

DAYS ON THE HILL



THE AUTHOR

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The head which "The Old Stalker" is holding, is a very fine one the right bay antler being eighteen inches

DAYS ON THE HILL

BY

AN OLD STALKER

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

ERIC PARKER

SHOOTING EDITOR OF *THE FIELD*



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INTRODUCTION

BY ERIC PARKER

WE have left the Lodge by the turf path that borders the burn ; past the troœolum on the gamekeeper's cottage wall, past the harebells and the wild raspberries under the larch wood, along the sheep-cut tracks through the ling and bell-heather, and we are out on the open moor. Above us the path turns right and left in the bracken up the hill ; we climb by it to the grey stones above, by wet mosses and shining quartz, to the spaces of thin grass beyond the heather ; we climb higher over that wiry grass to the skyline, to another skyline beyond that ; farther still to a rim of boulders, to which we creep on all-fours. We peer over the rim ; the stalker's glass comes from its case, and we are spying for deer.

I know no morning in all the year which is to be set beside that first hour in the forest. You are looking out over the largest corrie of the glen, and the far flank of it rises green-grey and boulder-sown into blue air ; beyond the glen the hills shoulder each other to the horizon ; and set about the floor and the slopes below you are spaces in which you are watching deer—a stag with half a dozen hinds here, a lot of thirty

stags and hinds there, and on a wide plain by the burn a great herd feeding, every sort of head among them from switch to ten-pointer—that heavy beast with his dark mane there among the peat-hags. Will you choose him to stalk ? There are others—a royal, you think, in that lot half hidden. Which shall it be ? The morning, the day, the stalk lies before you ; the Lodge, the telephone, the post are miles away ; London scarcely exists. You are alone on the hill with your stalker and the pony-man ; there are those deer in the sun, with a quiet wind blowing—what other hour, in what other place, would you choose before the freedom of this ?

Well, that is the point of view of one of the three of you stalking deer there on the hill. What is the point of view of the others, and particularly of him who is rightfully known as “the stalker” ? (He is “the stalker” and you are “the gentleman” in the tongue of the forest.) He is to take you up to one of those deer ; what does he think of the day’s work ? Is it work or pleasure ? Does he, too, look at the sun and the sky, as you do, and thank Heaven for such a day ? Not exactly as you do. To him the sun and the wind mean something else besides. They will decide the plans, they will control the end, of the day ; and the end of the day he hopes will be a good stag saddled on the pony—a heavy beast for the larder, a great head for the Lodge wall. And you, too, are something else besides his “gentleman” ;

you are either a good or a bad shot, a pleasant companion or not, you will be lucky or unlucky, and you will make or mar his day for him. You are out on a holiday. This is his day's work.

Not that he does not delight in it. To him it is the supreme activity of the year, this business of stalking stags in the corries of this forest. There is the hind-shooting to follow in the winter, but it is only the stags that count. And the stalking is but a short season, from the last days of August, when the heads are coming clean of velvet, to the middle of October, when the stags roar for the rut ; and through those ten weeks he is out day after day on the hill, with different plans for the approaching of different beasts, with different paths up the hill to his beat, different weather, different winds. And how well he knows the ground ! Since he was a boy he has heard his father and the other stalkers and gillies talk of the forest and its deer ; he has walked with the grouse-shooters on the low ground and the tops ; he has learnt the tracks of the shepherds and the lines of the fences along the march ; he has found his way about the forest by day and by night, in mist and in snow, ever since he was first allowed to come out and help with the hind-shooting—hard work, that, with so many to be entered in the account-books by February ! And now that he is a man, and himself takes men up to deer, he is proud of his knowledge

and his skill. He has bought both by experience, and how long and how various his experience has been you may guess when he has picked for you the stag you are to stalk, and tells you how he means to bring you to him, and his hopes and fears of chances by the way.

The elements of the stalker's craft the veriest beginner can understand—not to be seen, not to be heard, not to be winded. The breeze must be blowing from the deer to you, or, at all events, never from you to the deer—every one knows that. You will come upon your stag from above him if you can, for deer look down and not up hill—you understand what the stalker is trying for there. But you cannot know the forest as he does, who has spent his life upon it. He is taking you across a piece of ground, perhaps, which you notice runs ridge-wise this way and that; he goes slowly and more slowly, tossing tiny tufts of grass into the wind. Why? He knows, as you did not, that if the wind is blowing at a particular strength from a particular point, although from the clouds above you it looks to be coming straight from the deer to you, it will be deflected by the conformation of the corrie beyond, by some stark face of rock that hurls it aslant, to blow from you to the herd. He must make sure before he goes on, or in another moment the hated taint which you set in the air will be carried to those delicate deer nostrils, and the scattered herd will close together to go galloping over the brow.

But the stalker must know more than the forest, more than the shape of the ground he travels over. He must know the deer, what they are and what they will do. He must know how they will behave if left to themselves, or if they are startled or driven ; which way they will go, where he will find them again. Knowledge of these things comes to most stalkers by experience, but to some, surely, by instinct. And lastly, for the purpose of his calling, he must know more than deer. He must know something, too, of men. He must be able to gauge character and to measure strength and nerve ; his business is to take other men up to deer, and he will take different men different ways. The schoolboy, wildly keen for his first stag ; the soldier on leave, equally ardent, perhaps more skilful, perhaps more anxious ; the tenant of the forest who has experience, yet has to be humoured into profiting from the greater experience of another ; Midas from the city, of physical proportions unsuited to the tilt of the hill—each in turn will be the stalker's “gentleman” ; lean, I think, and grey, the stalker slides and crawls in front of each ; and for each, at the end of the day, he will somehow have contrived a stag.

Have I succeeded in drawing anything like a picture of “An Old Stalker”—the author of this book—at his day’s work ? If not, he must tell the story himself—in his chapter “Taxed Resources,” for instance, when time after time,

INTRODUCTION

although he has "felt" that the deer would do this or that, they keep on setting him fresh riddles. He has come nearly to the end of the day, he has a wounded stag in front of him which he must get, darkness is closing in, and he cannot even use his telescope; and yet, since he "feels certain" that the stag is in a particular place and will do a particular thing, he tries a last forlorn hope and succeeds in getting his companion a final and decisive shot. Or take, again, the chapter "Wind and Light," and look at the problems set him, to be solved from knowledge rather than by reason. Here is a corrie, for example, in which, because of the shape of it, deer can only be approached from the north, and in which, absurd as it may seem to the arm-chair critic, when a northerly gale is blowing you can go straight down-wind to your stag—it is, in fact, your only chance of a shot. Or here is a stretch of ground which has to be crossed in full view of the herd. How is the stalker to do it? He creeps by the edge of the peat where it joins the grass, and along that mixed colour-line of brown and green he passes unobserved into cover beyond. Or here, once more, is the whole of one side of a corrie in shadow and the other side in the sun. From the sunny side the stalker cannot see the deer which he knows are in the shadow, and he argues consequently that if he walks through the shadow they will not see him when they, in turn, are in the sun. One day he gets his chance, and

walks along the shadowy side of the corrie, in full view of the herd in the open, unseen.

This is the “old stalker”; this is the gifted and tested hunter of deer, whom every young gillie, every boy who is allowed to take the hill for the first time would wish to be. But though “An Old Stalker” is his signature, his book proves him to be something more. He is an observant naturalist who has watched and learned the habits of birds and of beasts other than the red deer. More, even, for he is that rare combination, one who is skilled in a great field sport and who can write of what he has seen and known. Those who know, it has been said, are few and cannot write; and those who can write are many, but they do not know. I was reminded, when I first read these chapters, of the gillie in Sir James Barrie’s play, *Mary Rose*, who breaks in upon a conversation with an unexpected observation in French.

The beginning of this book was an article which reached me at the offices of *The Field*. It has been supplemented by other articles, from which, with the author’s consent, I have here and there altered a phrase or cut out a repetition. Otherwise the book appears in the same form in which I welcomed it when it found its way from Perthshire to London. That is a welcome which I hope and believe is now to be extended.

ERIC PARKER

October 1926

*The publishers desire to express their indebtedness
to Mr. H. Frank Wallace for leave to reproduce
several of his beautiful views of famous forests.*

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION. BY ERIC PARKER	PAGE v
--	-----------

PART I

THE STALKER

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	THE STALKER'S CALLING	3
II.	DISCOMFORTS IN STALKING	12
III.	EXPERIENCES AND BLUNDERS	21
IV.	FOREST STAFFS	32
V.	MY LONGEST STALK	42

PART II

THE RIFLE

VI.	"FIRST" STAGS	57
VII.	MISSING AND "BROWNING"	71
VIII.	TAXED RESOURCES	84
IX.	MAKE-BELIEVE	96
X.	MUTUAL DECEPTION	108
XI.	A RECORD OF ECCENTRICITIES	121
XII.	SHOOTING DANGERS	131

PART III

THE FOREST

XIII.	SYMPATHY AND CRUELTY	147
XIV.	CALVES, WEATHER, AND GULLS	156
XV.	HUMMEL STAGS	163

CONTENTS

CHAP		PAGE
XVI.	GROUSE IN DEER FORESTS	177
XVII.	HEATHER BURNING	185
XVIII.	ACCIDENTS OF THE FOREST	193

PART IV
STALKING DAYS

XIX.	DAYS WITH DEERHOUNDS	205
XX.	TERRIERS AS TRACKERS	216
XXI.	MIST	228
XXII.	WIND AND LIGHT	240
XXIII.	A MEMORABLE DAY	250

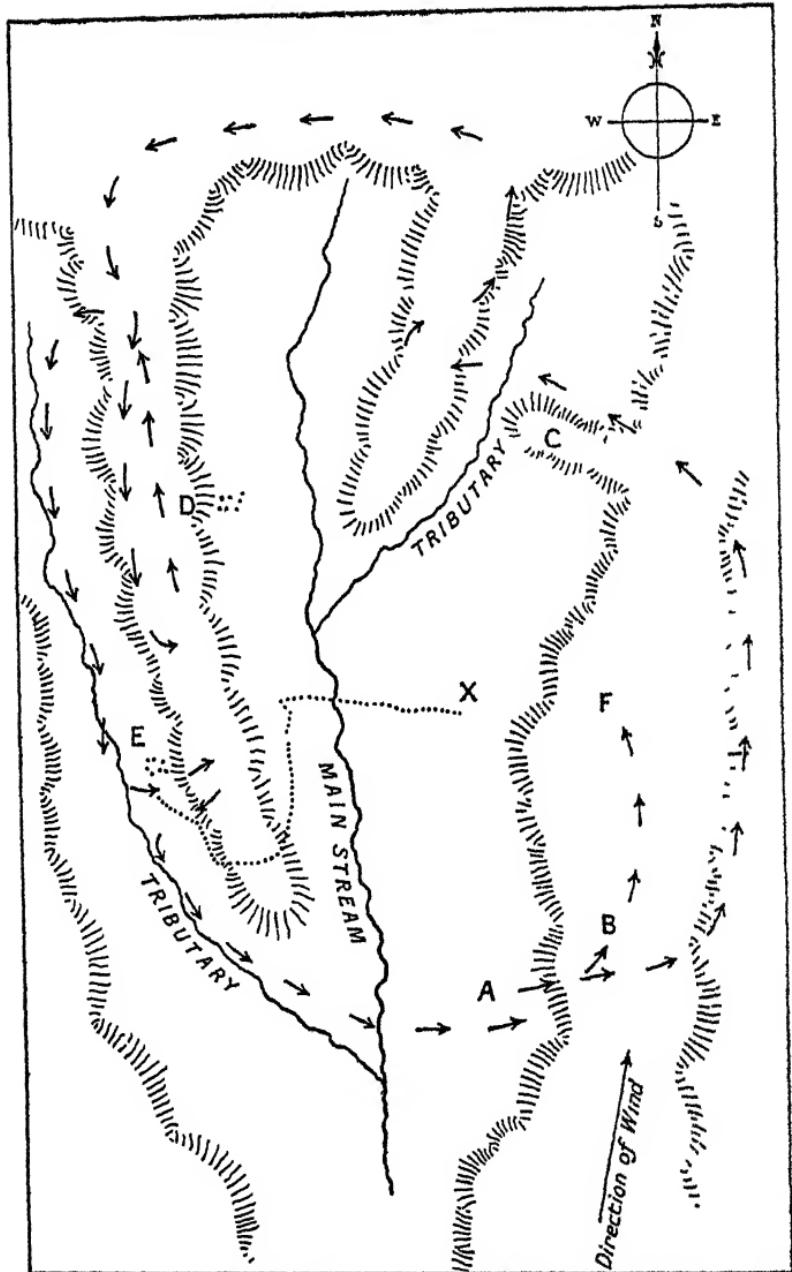
ILLUSTRATIONS

THE AUTHOR	<i>Frontispiece</i>
	FACING PAGE
GLEN LICHED AND BEN ATTOW, WITH THE AFFARIC HILLS BEYOND	24
STRONTIAN, WITH THE ISLAND OF MULL IN THE DISTANCE	46
LOOKING ALONG KINGIE FACE TO GLASS CORRIE.	78
PART OF THE SANCTUARY, KINTAIL.	114
CLUANIE FOREST, LOOKING OVER LOCH CLUANIE	150
SGUR-NA-CICHE AND CORRIE-NA-GALL, GLEN KINGIE	194
GLOMACH, LOOKING TOWARDS BEN ATTOW	234

SKETCH MAPS

I. MY LONGEST STALK	2
II. MUTUAL DECEPTION	56
III. HUMMEL STAGS	146
IV. WIND AND LIGHT	204

P A R T I
THE STALKER



SKETCH I.—TO ILLUSTRATE CH. V. "MY LONGEST STALK"

A. Where we first saw deer. B. Where hind rose. C. Ridge where we first saw herd. D. Where we next found them. E. Where we again found them. F. Where we shot from. X. Stag.

Arrows=our wanderings. Dotted line=route taken by deer.

CHAPTER I

THE STALKER'S CALLING

THE professional deer-stalker who attains to the highest degree of perfection in his calling must be born—not made. He must have a natural aptitude for his vocation. Of course, any one with an average mentality can attain to mediocrity, but there are many things that affect deer-stalking which pass out of the observation of the mediocre. Only too often it is these things which make the difference between failure and success. I have known stalkers who consider their knowledge complete when they know how to avail themselves of cover in approaching deer, and have some idea of deflected wind.

Of all things that trouble a stalker air currents are perhaps the worst, because owing to peculiarities of ground formation they often blow in the most unexpected directions. I remember once endeavouring to meet a herd of startled deer, and at the place I decided to do so the wind blew straight from me towards their line of approach. I was near the top of a steep hill, up which the deer had to come, and I was convinced that until near the top the wind would

blow at right angles to where I was. "Do you expect to get a shot from here?" said the gentleman who accompanied me. When I said "Yes," he declared we would never see them, as they would get our wind, and urged moving to a different position. I refused to budge. A ridge, a fairly long shot off from where we stood, hid the underlying ground, and when they broke over this I resolved to shoot, a nearer approach being dangerous. In due course they appeared, paused when they gained the top of the ridge, giving a steady chance, and we bagged two good deer. My companion congratulated me upon my success, and admitted he never expected to get a shot, as the position I took up seemed quite hopeless, while the one he pointed out appeared to offer every chance of success. I admitted that it did, but I did not tell him I had previously tried it under exactly similar conditions, and had no desire to repeat the same blunder.

That wild creatures of widely different species are capable of conveying knowledge of impending or probable danger to each other is sometimes forgotten by stalkers. Well do I remember witnessing an example of this a good many years ago. For some reason I happened to be out alone that day, and during its course saw the shooting party preparing to stalk a lot of deer. The animals lay about half-way up a hillside, and could be approached from bottom or top. It was soon evident that the stalker meant to

take the former alternative. It was certainly more direct and less laborious, but I was not at all convinced that it was likely to prove the more successful. That particular part of the forest was the favoured habitat of a good many hares, and I feared what might result from disturbing them. As the stalking party advanced uphill they continued springing hare after hare. Straight uphill close past the deer they scampered. They lay and watched the first hare pass. When the second came, most of them got up and looked round. When the fourth lumbered up, evidently satisfied that all was not right, they moved off at a gentle trot, and when the stalkers arrived, where they expected to get a shot from, not a deer was to be seen.

Later, when I joined the party, both stalker and sportsman were loud in the lamentations of their bad luck. If it had not been for those hares——! That night, when I got the stalker alone, I remarked, “Don’t you think it was possible to have got a shot at those deer?” “So I would,” he answered, “if it hadnna been for thae hares.” “Now,” I replied, “suppose you had gone to the top of the hill and approached the deer from above. All the hares you rose would have gone uphill, and the deer would not have seen one of them; whereas, by approaching from beneath, you practically drove the hares straight towards them. You would certainly have had farther to go, but you would in all probability have had something to show

for your trouble." "Man," he meditatively rejoined, "I never thocht o' that!" How many stalks are spoiled from want of "thocht"?

It is just the same with grouse. If pack after pack fly over a herd they very soon realise that something has disturbed the birds, and, apprehending danger, move off. Of course, there are many occasions when risks of that kind are unavoidable, but they are undertaken oftener than need be, and just for want of a little consideration. Roe-deer, too, have to be carefully guarded against. They are often to be found in the vicinity of deer, and when the stalker is after large game, he is apt to ignore their presence. If they become alarmed and dash off, the deer follow suit, leaving the stalkers to extract what consolation they can from such exclamations as "If it hadn't been—"

Then most stalkers do not pay enough attention to the physical and temperamental construction of the gentlemen who accompany them. Perhaps the best way of making my meaning clear will be to give a few of my experiences. I may fairly claim to have stalked to "all sorts and conditions of men," and I must admit I have found a few none too well adapted to the sport. A little consideration for the aged, stout, and nervous on the part of the stalker may—and often does—make all the difference between success and failure.

I once stalked for several seasons to a gentleman who was decidedly stout, and who, even

before putting on weight, had a large frame. I was exactly the opposite. Thin and spare, I could wriggle like an eel, and take the advantage of the last inch of cover. The first stalks we had where there was little to hide us proved failures, the deer bolting just as we were covering the last few yards. That their alarm was caused by our approach seemed certain, but when I ventured to suggest that they had seen some of us, I was always met with the reply, "I'll swear they did not see me." I was not, however, by any means convinced that such was the case, and inwardly blamed my companion for carelessness.

One day another man stalked to this gentleman, and I accompanied them. When they got down to hands and knees, I lay still and watched their progress. What I noticed was a revelation to me. The man stalking was considerably larger than I, but the gentleman was both higher and broader than he. Of course, for a stout man to wriggle forward on his stomach is an impossibility. After this I always made an allowance for this gentleman's bulk in approaching deer. If possible I never went beyond where I was satisfied there was enough cover to hide him. This made the range a little longer, but a steady shot was obtained, and results amply proved the wisdom of my method. The moral to stalkers is obvious: don't be altogether guided by the fact that there is cover for yourself; consider if there is also enough to hide

the gentleman who accompanies you. I admit that when the distance is fairly long it is hard to realise you can get nearer and still stop back, but the alternative is almost certain failure.

I can recall one gentleman who was altogether unique in my experience. He was a veritable giant—certainly several inches over six feet in height, proportionately built, and exceedingly stout. Getting him to the top was a slow and tedious job, for after about every fifty yards of a climb he had to lean over his staff and rest. Nor was that the worst of it. He either could not or would not go on hands and knees. In approaching deer, when we could no longer walk without being seen—and I was always apprehensive of his great height—his only other mode of progress was to get into a sitting position, place his hands on the ground by his sides, and move his body forward in the direction of his heels. As may be expected, we did not get many stags. His only redeeming qualification was he never cavilled at long shots, and most of those I gave him were of that description. In my long experience he was the only one I ever met who could not get down upon hands and knees, but I expect many stalkers have lived and died without meeting one such.

With aged or stout gentlemen I got very chary of going down into the bottom of corries early in the day. It was all right if we did not have to get up again, but if we had, the climb occupied so long that much of the day was

spent and chances not infrequently lost. I generally stuck to the tops as long as it was prudent to do so, and descended only when there was little probability of necessity for again ascending. Thus chances of deer were increased while useless expenditure of time and toil—I might also include temper—was avoided.

Experience also taught me that it was inadvisable to make aged or stout gentlemen shoot immediately after even moderate exertion if it could be avoided. Such gentlemen are easily blown, and in that state aim is often erratic. Much better results are obtained if the shot can be delayed till the sportsman has regained breath and composure.

Nervous sportsmen are really a difficult proposition for the considerate stalker. Much, however, depends upon the degree of nervousness. To attempt shooting immediately on getting within range is oftener than otherwise courting failure. If nervousness is only a little pronounced, equanimity can often be restored by lying or looking at the deer for a time, and developing a soothing conversation in quiet, even whispers. If one has to wait the rising of a stag prospects are considerably improved. In the interval any slight degree of nervousness wears off, probably owing to a prolonged survey of the deer at close quarters. As a matter of fact, with such men much depends upon the demeanour of the stalker. If he appears easy and indifferent, his companion unconsciously

assumes something of the same attitude. On the other hand, if the stalker is flurried or excited he very decidedly makes matters worse, and lessens any chance he may have had of obtaining a stag.

At the same time, I believe there are men whose nervousness nothing can overcome. The worst case I can recollect was that of a dignitary of the Church of England. He had got a day's hind-shooting, and I was appointed to accompany him. A lot of about two hundred deer lay in the bottom of a corrie. They had been driven there by the roughness of the preceding night, but as the day was particularly fine, I expected them to move back to the tops. I therefore pushed on as fast as possible to get in line of their retreat. Just as I got near the route I expected them to take, the first hind appeared. There was an accumulation of high, broken peat-banks at the place. Behind one of these we lay, while about 100 yards in front the deer appeared from behind another bank, and disappeared behind a third. The gap between these last two was quite 50 yards away, and as they were all that distance in full view, and moving at a walking pace in single file, our chance was a good one.

I pointed out a hind; my companion raised his rifle, and I watched the beast till she disappeared. A second and a third time the same thing occurred. Now I consider a miss quite excusable, as on such occasions the sportsman

has merely done his best and failed, but to abstain from shooting when a good chance offers was about the greatest irritation I had to endure stalking. Picking out another hind, I told him in a rather peremptory manner not to let her pass. At this he wailed out, "Oh dear! What shall I do? What shall I do?" "What the d—— would you do but shoot?" I replied, my patience thoroughly exhausted. He did so, but might just as well have not. Until the crucial moment I had no idea that this gentleman was so nervous. He was extremely quiet and reserved, and really did not look as if anything would perturb him. It was only after he spoke I noticed the pitiable condition he was in. I think that was his first and last day's deer-stalking.

I remember stalking to another gentleman for a week. We had shots daily, and despite the employment of all the arts I was capable of, the net result was a broken hind-leg, and that, too, of a deer other than the one aimed at. "I can back myself to break nine bottles out of every ten at a hundred yards," he finally remarked to me, "but the moment I get up to the deer my head seems to go." Clearly men of this class ought never to attempt stalking.

CHAPTER II

DISCOMFORTS IN STALKING

I CANNOT say I ever took kindly to hind-shooting as a sport, and I think my dislike is shared by most gentlemen who have spent any considerable time in pursuit of the "lordly stag." The class who usually participate in hind-shooting are young enthusiasts, or those who have had little or no opportunity of gratifying their tastes during the foregoing stalking season.

It may, therefore, be concluded that hind-shooting as a sport is unpopular. Why? Certainly not because stalking is easier, for if a herd of hinds is shot at two or three times, they become the most alert of animals, and at the slightest suspicion of danger they are off. But in stalking proper, there is always the fascination of at least attempting to get the best beast in the herd, and, if successful, the gratification of securing the trophy he carries. Alternatively the gratification may lie in killing an animal of abnormal weight, for it is not always the heaviest stags that carry the best heads.

In hind-shooting all this is wanting. One hind is very much the same as another; hinds

carry no permanent trophies, and unless for exceptional reasons their weights are seldom troubled about. Then conditions are disagreeable. The ground is usually sodden with water, and the wet goes to the skin with the first contact with mother-earth. The day, too, is short, and unless due consideration is exercised, miles of rough trackless ground may have to be covered after darkness has fallen. On such occasions, even when on a fairly well-known track, one finds rough places that he cannot remember ever having seen before. While on the Aberdeenshire-Forfarshire boundary I have not once, but several times, been late enough to distinguish clearly the flashes of the Bell Rock Lighthouse—I should think at least 50 miles distant as the crow flies. Only those who have traversed the hills after dark can realise the nature of the journey home from such high summits under such conditions.

Town dwellers ridicule the Highlanders for being superstitious. Placed under the same conditions, would they be one whit better themselves? They speak without practical knowledge, and a little experience would probably alter their views. My personal experience has convinced me that the superstition of the Highlanders is a natural sequence of their surroundings. Put a man, as I have often been, after dark and alone on the broken hillside, or amidst beetling precipices, hundreds of feet high, with not a human being or habitation within a radius

of five miles, and a feeling of awe, or to use the more expressive Highland term, “eerie,” will assuredly assail him.

On quiet nights a deathly stillness reigns. Suddenly a strange sound like what one could imagine to be the half sigh, half groan of some colossal giant breaks upon the ears, and all again is still. During quiet weather such sounds can occasionally be heard at all the hours of night and day, and I have often puzzled to account for them. I have noticed that they always emanate from the vicinity of running water—not necessarily waterfalls. The only solution I can offer is that they must in some way be produced by the action of temporary eddies or currents of wind acting on the stream.

Another bogie of the Highlanders is the will-o'-the-wisp, or “spunkie.” There can be no doubt that this is the phosphorescent emanation of some chemical substance in the soil. Returning home from hind-shooting one night after dark I happened to cross a patch of soft peaty surface. In doing so I thought I noticed a light among my feet. Looking down I found my boots to be all aglow with a soft bluish flame. I stooped and examined it. Passing my hand over my boots the flame adhered to my fingers, but it was absolutely devoid of heat. I walked on, and fresh flame burst from the soil at every step I took. I could discern that the whole surface of the peat was slightly phosphorescent. The disturbance of the soil evidently set free

the matter. Had it been present in greater volume, it would evidently have burst free itself, thus forming the Highlander's "spunkie."

During the hind-shooting period the weather is often bad, and not infrequently an unexpected snowstorm causes the loss of carcasses on the hill, and venison in the larder—the former being hid by snow, the latter delayed by blocked roads. Well do I remember one such occasion.

A gentleman had motored to the forest I was engaged on for a day's hind-shooting. There were two beats divided by a river that ran approximately north and south. Close to the river on the eastern beat was a large herd of hinds, and these the gentleman in question elected to go after. He took with him the other stalker, and to me allotted the other beat. I was not long in finding there were no deer anywhere near on my particular piece of ground. I, however, calculated that once shot at, the deer on the opposite beat would cross the river and make for a parallel corrie, separated from the one they were in by a long sloping ridge. On the top of this ridge I took up my position and waited developments. As I expected, the deer crossed the river, but did not come to the top of the ridge, stopping a considerable distance beneath me. Still, I thought they would come, and patiently waited.

Eventually they began to move off in an entirely different direction. They were certainly a fairly long way off, but I realised they

would soon be farther, and resolved to shoot. The rifle I had was double-barrelled. I saw the first hind drop, and, turning on to another, saw her drop also. Loading again, I was in time for the tail-end of the herd passing. The third hind likewise fell to the shot, and the fourth, turning, staggered back for about 50 yards, and lay down ; she was dead by the time I got up to her.

Before I had finished "gralloching" and collecting them together, I was joined by the other stalker who came to assist me, leaving the men with him to deal with the hinds he had got. "Have you been at the beast that went downhill from your first shot ?" he asked. "The hind I shot at first dropped dead," I answered. "Nothing of the kind," he rejoined. "I watched her go downhill for more than a hundred yards and then fall." We disputed the point for some time, finally going back to the place he said he saw the animal fall. Sure enough the hind was there. I had thus killed five hinds with four shots, my first bullet passing through the hind I aimed at and into one beyond, but why I failed to notice her I do not know. On the side opposite me four hinds were killed. We got all nine home and dressed that night. Before dawn a heavy snowstorm began and continued for weeks. The venison could not be got away. Latterly intimations were made that anybody who cared for a piece of it would be welcome to it. Some was taken, but

the lodge being remote, part of the meat went bad.

In this case we escaped being caught on the hill in a snowstorm. I have not always been so fortunate. About ten years ago, two young gentlemen, to whom the forest owner had granted a day's shooting, arrived at the lodge where I was between nine and ten o'clock in the morning. All portents seemed to me to indicate the imminence of foul weather. A strong easterly wind blew, carrying with it, not that crisp invigorating cold, but the penetrating chilliness that makes one shiver, while the sky was heavily overcast with a grey leaden pall. Left to myself I certainly would not have gone stalking that day, but to refuse would have greatly disappointed the two young men, so we went.

To me fell the farther and higher of the two beats. In ordinary circumstances I would have skirted its western boundary right to the far end, and worked my way homewards. But so threatening was the day that I concluded the sooner I got a shot the better. I therefore proceeded up the main valley until I was past the confines of the lower beat, and turned up the first corrie beyond and to the right. This corrie was fairly well sheltered, and in it I hoped to find deer. If not, I decided on determining my further course of action on reaching its top.

We had not proceeded far up the corrie when large heavy flakes of snow—the sure

precursors of a thaw or heavy snowfall—began intermittently to descend. I kept a sharp look-out for deer, and though I saw a few stags, no hinds were to be seen. As we pushed onwards the flakes thickened, and before we reached the top of the corrie the air seemed semi-solid with them. The corrie was terminated by a steep ridge along which ran a wire sheep fence, which formed our boundary. To hit this fence was my objective. On getting near the top of this ridge I looked upwards, hoping to distinguish the fence. My surprise may be imagined when, instead of seeing wires, I could make out through the dense snowfall what I took to be only wooden rails.

Now I knew that the only wooden rails in that fence were contained in a gate more than half a mile from where I intended striking it. It was inconceivable that I could have gone that distance off my intended route—still, what was this in front of me? Anxiously I pressed forward, and on reaching the fence a marvellous solution presented itself. On the leeside of every one of the six wires a mass of hoar-frost, from four to five inches broad, had accumulated. It was perfectly horizontal, and viewed through the gloom from underneath, as I had viewed it, bore exactly the appearance of rails. Had the day been fine, six such lines of congealed hoar-frost stretching in unbroken sequence for miles must have presented a striking spectacle. It is quite common for hoar-frost to

attach to the leeside of wires at such high altitudes, but never before or since have I seen it to such a breadth and length.

On reaching the top we got the full fury of the storm. A strong wind blew, and the drift was suffocating. So thick was the snow that I do not believe I could have seen beyond the point of a fishing-rod. All thoughts of hinds were now abandoned, and my mind was entirely centred on finding my way home. I knew only too well by experience how stupid one gets when lost, and I dreaded what might happen if I failed to recognise where I was. Lost in a fog one has a chance, but lost in such a blizzard as this I did not like to contemplate what the consequences might be. Swinging to the right, I found that a high mountain somewhat broke the violence of the gale, though it was still bad enough. We went on, and, by exercising great care, I always knew within a few yards where I was until our journey was completed.

Arrived home, we found that the other party had preceded us by hours, and, like ourselves, had failed to obtain a shot. All difficulties were now supposed to be over, but the sportsmen at least were yet to find that this was very far from being the case. After a change of clothes and a cup of tea they prepared to depart. Their car was housed in a shed, but before they could get it on to the road a strip of grass had to be crossed. Upon this soft snow-covered surface the wheels skidded. Again and again

they tried it, but the wheels still went round without going forward. Ultimately they had to get out, and by our united efforts we managed to shove the car on the roadway. It went off without further trouble, no doubt much to their satisfaction.

Meanwhile the storm continued with unabated fury, and they soon encountered wreaths which the car could hardly push through. The climax was reached near a farm when about four miles on their journey. Here the car became firmly embedded in the snow. Shovels were obtained at the farm, the car was dug out, and stabled in one of the farm buildings. At an hotel, about a mile distant, the two put up for the night. Next day broke fine and calm, but the roads were heavily blocked. To add to their cheerfulness the innkeeper informed them that he did not expect the roads to be cleared for days. They could not afford to wait, so they had perforce to cover the ten miles that lay between them and the nearest railway station on foot. A month elapsed before they got their car away.

CHAPTER III

EXPERIENCES AND BLUNDERS

THERE is not a professional stalker of even a few years' standing who has not made mistakes and blunders, whether admitted or not. Human nature being what it is, there is a tendency in most of us to conceal our mistakes, and stalkers are no exception. Mistakes in deer-stalking are only too easily made. Some are quite excusable, and some partly so, while others are clearly culpable, due to want of knowledge, want of thought, rashness, and such-like causes. There is some excuse for a novice trying to hide an error, as he realises that present success or failure may govern his future. Discriminating sportsmen can generally pretty accurately estimate the amount of error and make due allowances; but, unfortunately, gentlemen are not all discriminating, and I have known stalkers blamed for mischances when they were perfectly innocent.

Some of the more outstanding blunders I have made I can vividly recollect. One of these was entirely due to exasperation. For two or three seasons I had stalked to a gentleman visitor who was a great friend of my employer. I

liked to stalk to this man, as he had a very genial and kindly disposition, and was a very good rifle shot. Given a moderately decent chance the result was certain.

Again he returned for his annual stalking holiday, and again I was appointed to stalk to him. On the first day out, I got him up to a stag, and although the chance was by no means a bad one, he missed. I was somewhat disappointed, but my mortification may be imagined when the same thing occurred on the next day, and the next. For ten consecutive days we were out together, every day we had chances often more than one, and he never touched a beast he aimed at. I gave him chances at short and long distances, but the result was always the same.

Next day the mist hung low on the hills, and while we were passing through it, we came on two stags. I at once distinguished them to be very small, with horns about a foot long, but to my companion, who evidently did not know the magnifying effect of mist, they seemed stags of the first class. "There are two good deer," he whispered. I hesitated for a moment and decided, "Well, it doesn't matter, these will serve the purpose just as well as royals." Aloud I said, "Yes, they'll do," and handed him the rifle. To my utter astonishment and chagrin, instead of bounding away unscathed, the first stag dropped dead where he stood, and the other shared the same fate as he turned to see

where the report came from. On getting up to them the gentleman was disillusioned indeed. He thought that I, too, had been deceived by their size by the mist, and though I considered it prudent to say nothing, I was much cut up. Strange to say, that gentleman after this regained his previous form of markmanship. But why did he lose it? I can offer no explanation.

I think that was the last occasion on which I allowed a gentleman to shoot at a small stag under the impression that it was a large one. I had done so oftener than once before, and almost invariably the animal was hit. Put a good stag before one of the novices and he is perfectly safe; put a small one and he gets the bullet fair and square in the shoulder. To all stalkers I would say, "Don't represent a small stag as a large one unless you are prepared to take the consequences."

On another occasion I was out stalking on a very misty day. I had gone to the far end of the beat to get all the advantage I could if the mist lifted. Here a sort of circular wall of turf was built to afford shelter. For a time we went outside and walked about. While doing so I heard a dull, muffled sound rapidly approaching. It was made by deer at full gallop. We rushed to the shelter, but could not reach the rifle which was lying on the seat, and the entrance was on the other side. The deer appeared and disappeared like

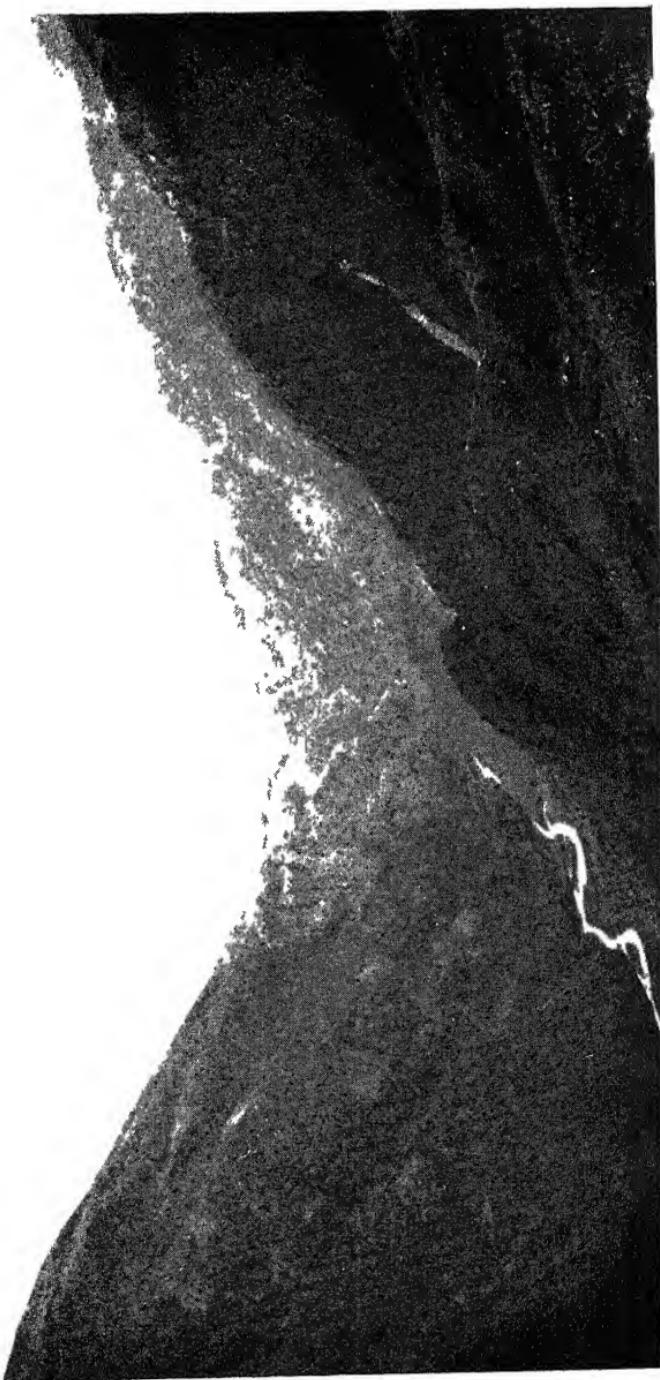
phantoms. If I had stood the rifle against the wall I might have had a shot; as it was we were helpless. Ever afterwards I took care to have the rifle ready for all emergencies.

As the deer passed within 25 yards of us, I could see that there was a good switch-horn among them. Just in front of us was a steep decline to the east, at the foot of which was the head of a big corrie stretching southwards. Beyond that the ground rose and passed into another forest. I thought it probable the deer we had seen might go down the corrie in question. Going to the foot of the decline, I could make out the fresh tracks of the deer passing into the corrie, but, of course, could not be sure whether it was the same deer or not. As the mist showed no signs of lifting, I decided to proceed carefully down the corrie in hopes of coming upon them.

At the pace at which the deer were going I knew they would go for some distance before they would stop. I reckoned where this would be, and when near the place proceeded with caution. In a little I could make out through the fog the forms of animals, just where I expected them to be. The mist was not so dense here, and kept alternately clearing a little and then thickening. Getting the best vantage I could, I made out a stag lying on the peat bank. He was evidently a switch-horn—at least I could see no other points—but was he the one that had passed us? I could

[H. Frank Wallace

GLEN LICHD AND BEN ATROW, WITH THE AFFARIC HILLS BEYOND



get no nearer for fear of disturbing the herd, and it was only when the mist thinned that I could make out the horns at all. I had an impression he was not so good as the stag I had already seen, and yet it was here I expected the deer that passed us to stop if they entered the corrie. I told the gentleman who accompanied me that I was not at all certain of the beast, but he agreed to shoot at the first favourable opportunity. The stag offered a fairly good mark on the top of the bank, and when the mist again thinned my companion shot. The stag never rose. He was certainly a switch-horn, but not nearly so good as the beast that had passed us at the shelter. Clearly I had made a mistake, but I think, under the circumstances, an excusable one.

The worst blunder I ever made was in exceptional circumstances, and though everything eventually ended as happily as the conventional novel, there is no denying the fact that I took too much for granted, and acted without sufficient thought and care. The morning had been bad, but broke up fine with a strong blustering gale from the west. Under such conditions deer are often wild and unsettled. We had made a late start, and as I could see nothing worthy of attention on the lower part of the ground I pushed farther on. Of course I kept to the eastern extremity of the ground, and eventually reached a part where it was bounded by a neighbouring forest. This bound-

ary ran practically straight ahead for more than a mile, then turned to the left abruptly, dipped into a deep hollow, and then rose to and passed along the top of a high hill, with an almost perpendicular rocky face on our side. The ground which adjoined us was flattish and peaty, but at its lower end descended steeply into a corrie below.

I could see all the peaty flat, but there were no deer there, and I was beginning to wonder if we were to have any success, when a couple of rifle shots sounded in the head of the deep corrie on our neighbour's ground. In a little while a small lot of about twenty stags appeared. They raced up the flat towards the far end of our boundary. Cutting off the corner they crossed the hollow, and appeared on the slope beyond. They had had a long run and were now inclined to take more time, but if they went a few hundred yards farther they would again be off our ground. This they did, but in doing so they left the shelter of the high hill, and exposed themselves to the full force of the gale. Here they paused, and after some aimless movements turned back. Walking on pretty fast, taking a bite of grass now and then, they moved along the lower part of the slope until they came to the perpendicular face. Here, sometimes stopping, sometimes walking, they began threading their way through the rocks westwards.

They were still unsettled, and as there were

several stags well worth shooting among them, and a good chance could be got from the top of the rocks if I could get there in time, I resolved to hurry on. At the elevation at which they were they commanded a good view in our direction, so leaving the man with the pony by a cairn of stones where he could see all that happened, I set out on the long detour which I had of necessity to make as fast as possible. As it happened, all went well, and when I carefully looked over the top of the steep more than half-way along, I found the deer immediately underneath me. They were appearing from underneath a cliff, crossing a narrow spur of rock that projected itself well forward, and again disappearing under another cliff. I did not know how many had already passed, so resolved to take the first good stag that came. Handing the gentleman the rifle, I told him to be ready for eventualities, and to lose no time when a chance offered. A good stag emerged from under the cliff and stood up broadside on the very top of the spur of the rock. "Take him," I whispered. He did so, but though a good shot, he evidently did not make sufficient allowance for the stag being so much below him, and the bullet passed harmlessly over the back of the animal. The stag still stood, evidently endeavouring to determine from which direction danger threatened. "Over him; try again," I exclaimed. Again the rifle rang out, and I saw the bullet hit the

animal rather far back in the flank. With a single bound he disappeared under the cliff in front.

I thought the shot was fatal, but when the deer again appeared after having been for some little time hidden by the rocks, I could see a stag whose side gleamed red with blood in the bright September sun. To the westward the rocks terminated suddenly in a steep decline. For the bottom of this the deer were heading. There was just a bare possibility that we might again get within range at this place. If so, not an instant was to be lost, so we at once set off along the level top as fast as we could run. Our efforts were vain. We were just in time to see the deer disappear over a ridge on our right, the wounded stag among them. A corrie of considerable size terminated here, and beyond this was a large valley, whose surface was extremely broken and irregular. Towards this the deer were heading, and thither I went. This ground I scanned until convinced that further search was useless. I could not see a deer of any description. I then thought the wounded animal might have turned down the corrie, the head of which we passed. I turned back, but the corrie was bare and open, and I was not long in convincing myself he was not there.

Very much disappointed with the results of the day, I now began to steer for home. In doing this I got more into the centre of our beat, in

order to get within view of the pony-man, who would know what to do from our actions. I had previously noted him coming round after us, but he was not where I now expected him to be, nor could I see him anywhere. I therefore concluded he must have turned downwards at the eastern end of the rocks, and was proceeding homewards by way of the main end of the valley. This was not the route usually taken, but as he was a capable man and quite fit to look after himself, I gave him no more consideration.

In due course we arrived at the keeper's cottage, where tea and a rest were generally taken before the further drive of three or four miles to the lodge. The pony-man had not arrived by the time tea was over, though I calculated he had ample time to do so, but we agreed to wait until he came. An hour passed without bringing him; darkness began to close in, and still he came not. I now became thoroughly alarmed, and feeling something much out of the usual had occurred, we set off to try and find the missing man. We had retraced our steps for more than a mile when out of the darkness loomed in front of us the forms of a man and a pony, the latter with a stag on its back.

The pony-man soon enlightened us as to what had really happened. The stag we shot at did not go far after receiving the bullet. He had lain down at the foot of the ledge of rock under

which he had disappeared and which hid him from our view. When the man approached him he found the animal possessed of enough life to render it impossible for him to bleed him. Though scarcely able to walk, the stag could still stand and show a menacing front. Through the telescope the man could make out no wounded stag going away, and deeming we were only trying to get another shot, sat down to await our return. Convinced at last that we were not coming back, he determined upon action. Gathering some stones he began to pelt the stag, and by one well-directed blow on the forehead so stunned the animal that he was enabled to use the knife with safety. With the vantage afforded by a peat-bank, he managed to get the carcase into the saddle, after which all was plain sailing. Had the pony not been quiet, and the man a powerful fellow, this could not have been done under such conditions, for the beast was a heavy one.

This explained matters so far ; but what about the blood-stained animal we had pursued ? That the gentleman missed his first shot was certain, for I saw the bullet strike. There can be no doubt that the beast in question was wounded by one of the shots we heard in the neighbouring forest. In his flight on to our ground it was the left or sound side that was always towards us. After we shot, the other or right side was exposed, and he had probably crossed the spur of the rock where the deer

showed before we got forward. As it was we had to thank the pony-man for the stag. I admit the circumstances were highly deceptive, nevertheless, I consider this the greatest stalking blunder I ever made.

CHAPTER IV

FOREST STAFFS

DEER-STALKING depends for its success more, perhaps, upon the staff employed than does any other form of British shooting. During the course of the season many stalks may be spoiled and much irritation caused by the blunders of gillies new to the job. On large forests where a disturbed herd has room to settle, matters may not be so bad, but where the acreage is somewhat limited a spoilt stalk may mean being finished with the herd for the day. Shooting tenants should, therefore, endeavour to try to engage as many experienced men as possible, and especially those who have been on the ground before.

I have known forests on which the staff was very efficient, and others on which it was quite the reverse ; and these conditions existed for many successive years. Why should this be ? Well, there are various reasons with some of which many shooting gentlemen are unacquainted, for it is remarkable how little inquiry lessees of deer forests make respecting so important a matter as their staff. The head-stalker is just told how many gillies to engage

on the usual conditions, and there, as far as the employer is concerned, the matter ends. He would probably find his interests would not suffer from a few inquiries as to what "usual conditions" really are.

At remote and secluded lodges, gillies are usually provided with accommodation. In some cases I have known the said "accommodation" to consist of a mere hovel which no self-respecting man would care to occupy. The result of this was that the so-called gillies were a rough, undesirable lot, always changing. Good hill-men were few on that forest during the years I knew it, for, after all, gillies relish some small amount of comfort, and it is wonderful how quickly reputation spreads.

When a forest forms part of a large estate the hill staff is sometimes drawn from the regular estate hands. This is a good system, as the men have their regular housing quarters, seldom shift, and are consequently well acquainted with the ground. In other cases the hill staff are drawn from the crofters and others who regularly lay themselves out for the job, part of whom may manage to remain at home overnight, and part board with keepers or in neighbouring houses. Some of these regularly return to the same forests several years in succession.

Where the staff of gillies is continually changing there is always some reason for it. It may be bad quarters, or underpay, or even an unpopular head-keeper. I have known the latter

cause alone prevent men from taking an otherwise good situation. Some keepers are most affable to their employers and guests, and little better than tyrants to the men under them. Such is human nature that the more subservient a man is to his superiors, the more apt he is to treat harshly the men under him. And often this trait is entirely unsuspected by his employer. Men so treated can hardly be blamed for trying to get even with the oppressor, but in deer-stalking the worst of it is that the innocent shooting tenant or his guest suffers at the same time.

Bad feeling among gillies or between gillies and stalkers is certainly not in the best interests of sport. I remember an occasion on which a stalker was unfit for duty owing to illness and a gillie was chosen to act in his place. This gave offence to another gillie, who thought he should have been chosen through right of seniority, though his claim in any other respect was very problematical. Unfortunately, these men went to the hill in the same party. The gillie-stalker saw a lot of stags in an entirely unapproachable position, but he had more than a suspicion which way they would go if alarmed from a certain point. So he told the man who accompanied him to start them from that place after he had taken up a position near where he expected the deer to appear. The stalker and sportsman had a considerably longer distance to travel than the man who was to start the deer,

and the result was that before they got forward they had the mortification of seeing the stags pass the very place they were making for. Out of chagrin at what he considered his companion's promotion, the man had purposely started the deer too soon, hoping thereby to show his companion's incapacity as a stalker. That he was hitting the sportsman at the same time did not matter to him. The latter, however, saw what had been done, though he probably did not suspect the reason, and that gillie got a well-deserved talking to.

Another somewhat similar instance came under my personal observation. For some reason, I forget what, a rearrangement of the duties of the staff took place when the season was about half spent. To one of the gillies was allocated the duty of leading the deer-saddle pony. For some reason or other the man resented this task, but there was no getting out of it short of dismissal ; he therefore undertook the job, but inwardly determined to make himself as obnoxious to all and sundry as he could. Naturally he was of a sullen, boorish disposition, and much lacking in intelligence and initiative. His spite was, therefore, mostly of the negative kind. When the stalking-party left him he paid no further attention to them, but curled himself up to sleep if the weather was not too cold—and he could sleep on a pretty cold day, too. Thus, if a stag was killed, signalling was of no use ; a man had to go all the way back for him,

no matter what the distance was. He also caused many stags to be left out overnight which could quite easily have been brought to the larder on the day on which they were killed. Of the movements of deer he could give no particulars whatever. Such conduct was extremely irritating, and none but a fool could have failed to realise the consequences. He was never employed on that or any other deer forest again.

The original allocation of the staff ought, as far as possible, to be adhered to. A rearrangement is almost certain to create jealousy and bad feeling among the men. Human nature being what it is, many people cannot bear to see a companion, as they consider, promoted over their heads, even though he may possess superior qualifications.

Well do I remember, when I was a gillie many years ago, an incident that reflected little credit to sportsmen and gillies alike. The head-stalker had been taken ill and died while the lessee of the forest was absent on business. There were, however, three guests at the lodge, and to these their host sent instructions to allow the whole staff to attend the funeral. This meant the loss of a day's stalking to them—in fact, their last day there—so they withheld the order, allowing the other stalkers to go, and keeping enough men to at least ensure them a day's sport. They changed the duties of the whole staff, and, of course, selected the men

who were to act as stalkers. No course better calculated to arouse ill-feeling could have been adopted. In the first place, every one wished to attend the funeral of their late chief, and that some were allowed to go and others not caused the men to look askance at the guests. Then the appointment of stalkers and the change of duties created jealousy among the men themselves. It was easy for me to see they were in a mood to make matters as unpleasant as they could for every one. This I was soon to find out.

I was one of those selected to stalk, and as that was my first season on the forest, the older hands felt aggrieved. I therefore found that they had so arranged that I had to accompany the most unpopular of the three guests. Personally, I did not care much for this gentleman, but consoled myself with the fact that he was the best shot of the three. Then a stag had perforce been left out overnight. This stag lay on my beat, but was to be lifted by the pony for the adjoining beat. As he lay close to the path my pony had to traverse, I suggested that both pony-men should go and saddle him, by which means I should get him out of the way, and have my own pony free for the day. The men agreed to take him home at once, but refused point-blank to put a hand on him unless I was there to assist them.

I urged that this was unnecessary ; that two men were quite fit to put a stag on a pony's

back. It was all in vain. I had to accompany them—a proceeding which gave me a needlessly long detour, and a long, stiff climb. The time thus lost greatly curtailed the short October day, and it was evening before I succeeded in getting the gentleman up to a stag which he killed. Then I found that my pony-man had gone off home and left me. That happened on a Saturday. It was Monday before the stag was brought in, by which time the carcass was practically useless. I arrived last at the lodge to find that neither of the other parties had got a shot. I have often wondered if this was due to incapacity or intention, or partly to both. In any case, the events I have described serve to show how lack of harmony in a staff affects sport, and the worst of it is that the sportsman may be quite ignorant of any malpractices.

Should gillies get tips ? This is a question which sometimes exercises the mind of shooting gentlemen. I have no hesitation in saying they should, if sportsmen wish to obtain the best results. It must be remembered that now I have nothing to gain or lose by the practice, but am simply giving my observations based on an intimate knowledge of how the system works.

The average Highland gillie is not the rapacious rascal he is often represented to be; nevertheless he likes to have his services recognised. The hopes of appreciation and reward certainly stimulate his efforts both mentally and physically. All the same, if he believes a gentle-

man to be of limited means, he does his best for him and looks for little or no recompense. A jovial, bright, and friendly disposition at once wins his favour, tip or no tip, while no amount of gratuity will overcome his aversion to the sour or sullen sportsman, or to the one who conveys to him the impression of his own insignificance and inferiority.

I will now give an example of the effect of a change from tips to no tips. On the forest in question tipping had been allowed for many years. Guests were at liberty to give from nothing upwards. One year a gentleman of foreign extraction rented the shooting, and, among other things, looked into the financial aspect of the matter. One of the conclusions he arrived at was that the gillies were to receive no tips, as they were already quite well paid. A box was, however, provided, into which the guests could drop gratuities for the stalkers, the said box to be opened, and its contents divided at the end of the season.

Now the gillies were only paid at the common rate in the district, which was not particularly high. The tenant, of course, paid them, but the owner paid the stalkers, and this probably led the lessee to think that the former class was over- and the latter under-paid, which was far from being the case. The result was that the gillies lost enthusiasm, doing only what they considered their duty, and nothing more. They ceased being helpful, and only those who have

been on a forest know how helpful an enthusiastic gillie can be. I have no hesitation in saying that stags escaped that could have been bagged merely by the men keeping quiet. And yet no one could say they were not doing their duty.

No doubt avaricious persons are to be found among gillies as among every other class—men whose sole aim seems to be gain in money and kind, and who are by no means particular how they attain their end. The worst instance of this kind I ever came across was a gillie who preyed upon all and sundry, and whose honesty I had reason to suspect. If possible he always contrived to get the biggest of the lunches provided, and was suspected of helping himself to the food supplies of his companions, for he boarded himself. A gentleman left a pocket-knife at a spring where he had been lunching, and sent this man back for it. He could not find it. I never thought he would.

In a lifetime's connection with Highland gillies I have found remarkably few dishonest. But I remember another man who was fond of money, and was in other respects what is known as a "character." He smoked, and often gentlemen would hand him their pouch to fill his pipe. Often I have heard him volubly cursing these "tobacco men" for the simple reason that he expected to get nothing more from them. One rather eccentric shooting tenant called for him to say good-bye at the end of the shooting season. "Good-bye, Charles,"

he said ; " I'll remember you a long time." The face of Charles, who evidently expected something more substantial, was very expressive. Next season, however, he managed to somewhat make good his disappointment. His master lost a favourite walking-stick and Charles found it. Instead of returning it he shoved it among the heather, and it was only after a reward of five shillings was offered that he produced it.

CHAPTER V

MY LONGEST STALK

ON many occasions I have had to spend a considerable time over a stalk, but the longest I ever had stands clearly forth in my memory, as it started in the morning and only terminated after the shades of evening had more than begun to fall. It must not, however, be understood that I spent all this time in attempting one approach. The whole of my time and attention centred in getting up to one and the same animal, which misfortune and difficulty prevented me from accomplishing until nightfall.

The shooting was a mixed one, and on the day in question a grouse drive had been arranged. One of the guests, however, pleaded to be allowed to go stalking. His request was not altogether willingly granted, and only on condition that he took with him no pony and no man but myself. These conditions were readily agreed to, so the pair of us set out. The night had been wet, and mist hung almost half-way down the side of the corries. To get up into this was simply to court failure, so I decided to keep to the bottom, where I could see over a considerable area. We had just gone about a

mile when a lot of deer caught my eye. They stood in a corrie that branched to the right of the main valley, and about half-way between the mist-line and the bottom. Through the telescope I could see a stag standing on a ridge boldly silhouetted against the fog-bank behind. He seemed a really good beast, his body heavy, and his horns, though not carrying a large number of points, strong, long, and widely spread. Undoubtedly he was well worth stalking.

To stalk from the bottom was hopeless, as the deer commanded a full view of the valley, so I resolved to approach from above, expecting to get a shot from the verge of the mist, provided it remained at the same level. We therefore retreated a little and began to ascend the hill on our right. We were not half-way up when a single hind sprang out of a small hollow, and to my chagrin dashed off straight towards the herd I intended stalking. Anxious to know what was to happen, I sought a point of vantage, there to watch and wait developments. The hind I saw still speeding on, but as far as I could judge she had not seen the deer in front of her, nor from the nature of the ground could she see them now. She was heading for a point considerably higher than where they stood, and eventually disappeared from sight among the mist. But the danger of alarm was not passed ; she might alter her course or they might notice her form among the mist as she passed above

them and shift their quarters. I therefore waited till I felt quite certain she must have passed them, and as they remained quite undisturbed, resumed my course.

Reaching a spot directly above where I had last seen them, I carefully descended to the verge of the mist. To my utter astonishment not a deer was to be seen on the whole hillside, which was plainly visible. What had disturbed them ? I suspected the hind. Of more importance was the question, Where had they gone ? Carefully I glassed all the ground I could see without result. Next I gave consideration to the route they were likely to take, and deemed it probable that they had either crossed the spur on the opposite side of the subsidiary corrie into the main one ahead, or had passed on to the ground behind me which, of course, the wind favoured. It was prudent to find out if possible whether or not they had done the latter, as if I went to view the main corrie from the intervening ridge and failed to see them then I would have to retrace my steps. If they had taken the lower course they would have to cross a long stretch of peat above and behind me. The mist prevented me from seeing the ground, but if they had gone this way their tracks would be plainly visible in the peat. Back I went and attentively traversed the whole length of peat. Not a fresh track was to be seen. I was convinced they had not moved downwards.

I now crossed the subsidiary corrie to the

spur on the opposite side, and, taking up a position just clear of the mist, proceeded to glass all of the main valley I could see. Straight across from where we lay I caught sight of some deer, but it was evident that more were hidden in the mist. By this time the fog was lifting, and in a little I could clearly distinguish the stag I was looking for. The mist rose very rapidly, and I could see the herd was a large one, certainly well over a hundred. The altered conditions left me in full view of the deer, and it was only with great care I managed to get under material covering without alarming them.

The position the deer occupied commanded a view of the whole valley, but an easy shot could be got from right above them. To get there meant going nearly two miles up one side and the same distance down the other. There was nothing else for it. By the time I reached the top of the valley the mist had vanished, and through the telescope I could see the deer feeding about quietly where they were. I could not see them again until I was within shot. So at least I expected. Losing no time I pushed on till I reached a spot immediately above where I expected to find them. Carefully I moved downwards, keeping a sharp look-out. Evidently they had moved a little. Even with greater care I proceeded until, to my amazement, I found the deer had gone. Naturally I was chagrined at this fresh disappoint-

ment, but as there was no good in throwing up the sponge, I at once set about finding where they had gone to. Such a large herd should not be difficult to locate, I argued. But look where I might I could not find a trace of them.

On the other side of the ridge which I had traversed was a shallow corrie parallel to the main valley, the ridge itself terminating abruptly where the burns that drained both joined. The lower part of this ridge I had not yet seen, and considered it unlikely the deer would be there. I, however, determined to look in it as a last hope. There I found them. I also found that they had taken up a very strategical position. The wind guarded approach from the lower side, where there was plenty of cover. The only possible approach was down the burn that drained the shallow corrie, but so erratic was the course of this that I felt anything but elated at the prospects. Nevertheless, a chance there was, and I resolved to take it.

My first difficulty was to get into the burn, for a part of the ground between me and it right up to the top was always within their view. Near the top of the corrie were broken ground and peat-banks which afforded the only possible means of reaching the ground. I therefore retraced my steps to this point. By this time the afternoon was well advanced and the sun shining brightly. I soon found that to gain the burn I would expose myself

[H. Frank Wallace

STRONTIAN, WITH THE ISLAND OF MULL IN THE DISTANCE



to the vision of the deer; but I was a considerable distance from them, and by careful movement and taking advantage of all I could, I gained my objective unobserved.

I got down the burn with less difficulty than I expected until about within 300 yards of the deer. Here a bend in the course of the stream exposed it to full view of a portion of the herd. The high banks on either side receded from the burn, which ran through a miniature plain, flat as a table, and covered with grass of unusual greenness. At such a short distance from the deer, to attempt crossing that small piece of grass in bright sunshine meant inevitable detection. Yet, at its farther side, cover was ample. It was an irritating position; so near and yet so far. But how were these few yards to be covered?

I was most unwilling to acknowledge defeat, and devoted all my thoughts to devising a plan for overcoming my difficulties. At last I hit upon an idea that seemed to offer a possibility of success. The grass, as I have already stated, was extremely verdant, the burn was dark, having a peaty bottom. Would it be possible to proceed along the colour-line without detection? I resolved to try. Getting into the burn I kept close to its grassy bank, nowhere more than a foot above the stream, my companion close behind me, and moved forward foot by foot, keeping an eye on the deer in view all the time. It was a somewhat

arduous undertaking ; but ultimately, and much to my gratification, we gained cover again. Certainly we were very wet, but the day was not cold, and neither of us grudged our immersion.

The steep bank now afforded ample cover, and getting right under where the deer lay we moved upwards full of expectations, but actually to find that further difficulties awaited us. Just where the hill abruptly terminated, a gently swelling ridge stretched from its top to the burn in which we were. On the side of this ridge lay about a dozen hinds, and from their elevation they commanded a good view all round. The remainder of the herd lay in a little depression, easy of approach had it not been for these hinds. We shifted up and down the burnside, trying every available bit of cover, but all in vain ; we could not get a glimpse of the other deer without exposing ourselves to those on the ridge.

I was convinced that when the deer rose for their evening feed they would move downwards across the ridge. They would thus come in view for a short time, but long enough for us to get a shot at the stag, provided he was not covered by others all the while. There was nothing else for it, so I resolved to wait. I must, however, admit that I had some misgivings. The gentleman who accompanied me was one of the best target shots in England, as his performances at various important rifle meetings proved, but he had done very little stalking, and was consequently

a novice in his practical knowledge of deer and their ways. I had stalked to him before, and was fairly conversant with his strong and weak points. At judging distances he was no use, but if told the range he never hesitated to take a long shot and was generally deadly, provided he got a comfortable position, plenty of time, and a standing stag. He was bad at picking out an individual deer in a herd, much worse if they were moving even slowly, and absolutely hopeless if they were moving at all fast. What caused me uneasiness now was: Would he be able to distinguish the stag during the short time they would be in view ?

At last the deer began to rise and feed over the ridge as I had anticipated. About half had crossed when I caught sight of the tips of the stag's horns coming forward within easy range. I at once admonished my companion to be ready. Onward came the stag, but constantly covered by other deer. He was busy cropping the grass, and as he never once raised his head, the gentleman was never able to distinguish him. Our chance was rapidly vanishing when the intervening hinds moved forward, leaving the whole of his body clear to the neck. It was now or never, and I did all I could to make him distinguishable. It was no use; the hinds closed up again, and in a few seconds disappeared over the ridge.

Naturally I was somewhat exasperated at losing what I considered a good chance, especi-

ally as a near view showed me that the animal was a really good one, both with respect to head and weight. The deer were now on top of the hill, and I knew that from a point near the top I could command a view of the whole face. To this point I now made, keeping just out of sight of the deer. Forebodings of further disappointment now made me very apprehensive. As already stated, the mist had given way to bright sunshine ; but the sun was now set, and the appearance of the cloudless sky bore every indication of frost. Frost meant a north wind ; the change to that direction was now due and might occur at any moment. This of course meant disaster, for I was now on the north side of the deer ; but I had no other way of approach. I hurried on as fast as possible, but had not covered more than half the distance to my objective when I felt a slight puff of wind on my left cheek. The wind had changed.

I did not need to see what had happened : the thunder of feet told me only too plainly. I reckoned that with the wind where it was the deer would swing round the edge of the hill and head up the main valley. If I could get to the opposite side of the hill on which we were before the deer passed I might get a shot from the brow above them. To gain this I had a much shorter distance to travel than they had, and on reaching it I found the foremost deer immediately below me. From where we lay the ground descended steep and rocky for a bit, then stretched away

to the burn in a long, gentle slope. The deer were not much alarmed but kept walking on at a sharp pace, taking a mouthful of herbage now and again. So large and so extended was the herd that they covered the whole ground within a few yards of the burn to the bottom of the steep. Many were within easy range, but where was the stag ?

At last I saw him. He was well down the slope ; in fact so far that I hesitated to ask my companion to shoot, even good though he was at long ranges. A little farther up the burn approached close to the hill, and if the deer continued as they were going, a much better chance could be got there. But would they do so ? The higher part of the herd evidently meant to do so, but there were a few hinds at the bottom who showed a decided inclination to cross to the other side. If the deer crossed the burn, then I considered our last chance for the day was gone. If I saw any sure indication of this, I resolved to risk a shot, desperately long though the distance was. For a time the deer remained undecided. So did I. In a little I saw the lower part of the herd move uphill. "It's all right now," I thought, "they're to keep to this side and we'll get a better chance in a very short time." Scarcely had I arrived at this conclusion when about a dozen hinds at the bottom raised their heads, and without a moment's pause, dashed across the burn and up the opposite hillside. The other deer at once

closed together and followed. The movement was so unexpected and rapid that there was no time for anything but looking on.

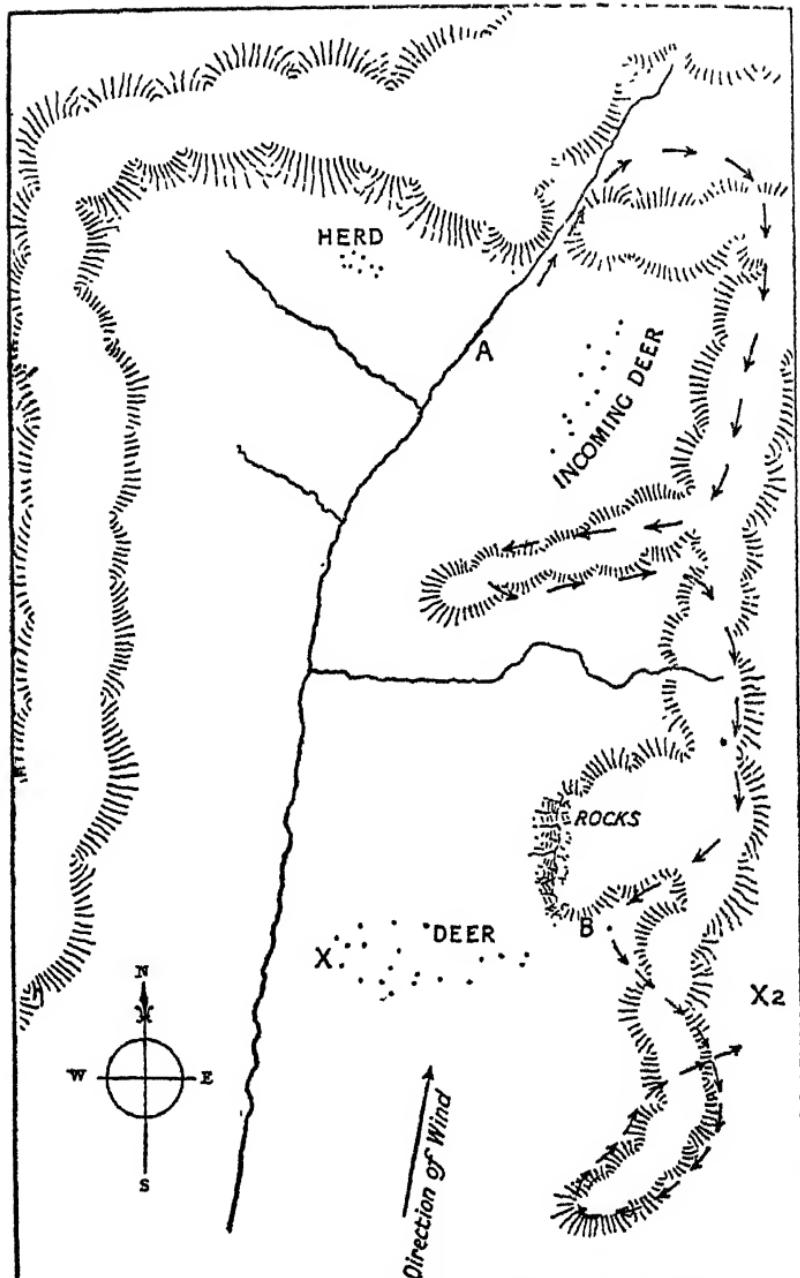
The day had been one long and uninterrupted succession of difficulties and disappointments, and now it looked like ending in defeat. The deer were now peacefully grazing on the hillside opposite ; but to get at them we had to cross the main valley, ascend the hill on the other side, and approach them from above. I looked at my watch, then turning to the gentleman, said, "There's still a chance—a poor one indeed, but still a chance." I then indicated the route we had to take, and continued, "We have only got one hour to do it in, and no certainty even then. Will you try ?" "Yes," he replied.

Without another word I hurried off at top speed. In crossing the valley I risked exposing myself to the view of the deer—there was time for nothing else—but got across safely. I was considerably faster than my companion, and in the ensuing climb had several times to wait for him before we reached the top, after which the going was comparatively easy. We had no difficulty in getting up to the herd, and at once I saw the stag directly under me. He was about 200 yards away, and as I looked he stepped forward on the top of a little knoll and, stretching out his neck, emitted a roar—the first I had heard that season. As he stood broad-side in a prominent position my companion had no difficulty in distinguishing him. "How

far ? " he whispered, as he took the rifle. " Two hundred," I replied ; " but the light is gone. Shoot for a hundred yards and nothing more."

Anxiously I awaited the result, and to my intense satisfaction saw the stag give a spring which indicated a hit in the region of the heart. We dragged him to the burnside, where I performed the usual obsequies, and left him for removal on the morrow. He had only six points of no great length, but his beam was massive, thick, and long. When placed on the scales he weighed over 19 stone, and proved to be the best stag of the season. This success crowned one of the most disappointing days I ever had. The last chance was almost a forlorn hope, but I have found that in deer-stalking it pays to play the game to the last possible move.

PART II
THE RIFLE



SKETCH II.—TO ILLUSTRATE CH. X. "MUTUAL DECEPTION"

A. Waiting for deer to rise. B. Where we shot from.
X. Stag. X2. Where I finished him.

Arrows A to B, our joint route; after that, mine only.

CHAPTER VI

“ FIRST ” STAGS

WITH every stalking season, articles appear in the newspapers entitled “My First Stag.” To the young deer-stalker the grassing of his first stag is a red-letter event, and, filled with enthusiasm, he sends a glowing account of it to the Press, oblivious of the fact that to the general public it is a matter of indifference whether the stag is his first or his hundredth. I wonder how many such productions are rejected by discriminating editors. Exceptional circumstances would certainly justify publication, but in most of the productions I have seen there is much that is similar. The dénouement is usually brought about by “a well-placed bullet.” Of course, without a bullet more or less well placed, there would be no stag first or otherwise. Mention is seldom made of preceding bullets that were not quite so “well placed.”

There is, however, another individual to whom a “first” stag is a matter of considerable importance, and he is the stalker, who, for the time being, acts as “guide, philosopher, and friend” to the novice. So elated is the young

sportsman with his success that he always bestows a douceur in money or kind on his stalker, the value varying according to his means and inclination. In fact, this tip has almost become an unwritten law, as well as the ceremony of being made "free of the forest," *i.e.* having the cheeks stained with the blood of the first victim, which is rigorously adhered to in many places.

If the head-stalker on a forest is at all avaricious he generally contrives that most of the "first" stags are obtained by his aid. In obtaining this result the forest lessee often unintentionally aids him. The young gentleman may be, and often is, a particular favourite with the lessee, who, desiring that he should get first blood, places him in charge of the head-stalker as being the most expert, which is sometimes far from being the case. When the stalker has any voice in the arrangements he generally contrives to make matters suit himself. Sometimes his machinations are defeated, but, of course, all stalkers are not of this type.

I must confess that I have been instrumental in aiding several gentlemen in their initial success, and can well remember the occasion on which I got my first "first" stag, if it can be so termed. The shooting I was then employed on comprised both moor and forest. Wind and weather had for some time proved unfavourable for stalking, and no decent stag remained on the ground. Conditions for shooting were, however,

good, and the lessee was devoting all his attentions to the grouse. Among the guests was a young gentleman who had come there mainly for the purpose of obtaining his first forest trophy. He had been disappointed, and had only one day more to stop.

That day he wished to devote to stalking. His host did not like his grousing facilities to be curtailed, but neither did he wish to be discourteous to his young guest. So a sort of compromise was made. I was but a young gillie at the time, though I possessed considerable knowledge of deer, so it was agreed that I should act as stalker for the day, thus leaving the keepers to devote their services to grouse. That a stag would be got seemed unlikely ; nevertheless I was allowed a pony in case the unexpected happened.

The day was warm and sunny. Hinds lay basking in the brilliant sunshine, stretched full length on the peat-hags. For some time I could see no stag at all like worth shooting, and I had made up my mind not to be over-fastidious. At last my attention was attracted to over a dozen hinds lying in the bottom of a far corrie that thrust itself wedge-shaped between two adjoining forests. Among them was a single stag which I thought appeared better than any I had yet seen, but light and distance prevented me from accurately determining. Getting closer, I found him to be a really good beast. I wondered why he should be there among these

hinds while all other stags of similar calibre had congregated by themselves in a different locality, but I gave no more than a passing thought to the matter.

I at once proceeded to stalk this stag, and got within easy range with little trouble. He lay flat on a sloping peat-bank, and I decided to wait till he rose. The hinds got up, fed about, and lay down again, but never once did the stag move. As he offered a fairly good target, as the days were now rapidly declining, and we had a good long way home, I asked my companion if he cared to risk a shot at the lying deer. He was quite willing, and did so. The bullet proved to be the hackneyed "well-placed" one, though I am afraid it did not hit the spot intended. It broke the vertebræ of the neck, and the stag never got to his feet. On going up we found him to be a heavy deer, with a real good head of ten points. On "gralloching" him I noticed a certain amount of watery fluid in his interior. I wondered why it should be there, but gave it no further thought. Naturally we were both elated—he at securing such a good initial trophy, I at pulling off a decided success when nothing but a failure was anticipated.

It was late before we got home, and all were indoors or departed. I at once set about removing the skin, and in doing so discovered a second bullet-hole. In an instant I realised the cause of the stag being there and the presence of the watery fluid. He had been severely wounded

—in fact, so severely that he could not have long survived—in one of the neighbouring forests, and had managed to make good his escape.

I was now rather at a loss to know what to do, but finally sought and obtained a private interview with my employer. On hearing my statement he was not a little nonplussed. As the stag had received a fatal wound, he felt that whoever inflicted it had a perfectly valid claim to the animal, provided they gave an accurate description of the head, and stated where he was hit. On the other hand, there was the probability that the stag would never be inquired after. One thing certain was that the young gentleman in question would be bitterly disappointed if deprived of his trophy ; nor would it be at all gratifying to find that he had shot a dying animal. So I was instructed to cut out all traces of the unknown bullet wound from the venison, which fortunately would be easily done, remove the skin, and say nothing about my discovery. These instructions I carried out, and their wisdom was justified, for no inquiries were ever made after the stag. But the question remains, Was this or was it not a genuine “ first ” stag ?

Two other occasions with “ first ” stags, both of them outside the ordinary routine, may be worth recording. One is an experience of my own, which I am egotistical enough to give first. The other is what I consider was one of my best

days in successfully overcoming very considerable difficulties.

My "first" stag should have been a hind, and though obtained many years ago, I vividly recollect every detail. I was but a mere boy when the keeper beside where I resided got an order from his employer for some venison. The hind-shooting season was drawing to a close, and the animals had become very wary. Moreover, as the weather was open, they favoured the highest corries. The stalker, therefore, decided that a drive would be the easiest and quickest way of getting what he wanted.

On the appointed day a few stalkers and estate hands assembled. I pleaded to be allowed to accompany them, but met with refusal. At last an old stalker said, "The laddie may be usefu' ; let him come." My delight may be imagined when I was armed with an old rifle that carried a heavy solid bullet, and was sighted up to something between 1000 and 2000 yards. It must be understood that I had been among deer and firearms almost from infancy.

A herd of over a hundred deer was eventually discovered in a corrie, but so situated were they that the route they would take on being disturbed was very far from certain. The likely routes were, however, ambushed, and I was placed at a certain point, after being carefully instructed how to direct the deer to the nearest rifle if they came in my direction. It proved to be in my direction that they did come, and

though I altered their course a bit, my utmost efforts failed to put them anywhere near the desired point. Realising that they were going to get clear, I resolved to shoot. They were a long way off, but I adjusted the sight to what I thought was necessary. They were passing broadside in a long line at the very edge of the old snow-wreath. I could not pick out a single animal to aim at, and did not much try. I aimed at the line, fired, and saw the bullet tear up the snow among their feet. I knew enough to increase my elevation. At my next shot I saw the deer scatter. I had seen this before, and I knew that one was down. I had a few more shots, how many I forget, but on going up to where the deer had been, I found a stag and two hinds lying dead. At which discharge the stag fell, I do not know, but certainly he was my first. We got no more that day, so, after all, the old stalker was right, for the “ laddie ” had proved useful.

On the other occasion two gentlemen—one of whom had never shot a stag—drove from the lodge to the head-stalker’s house, on a forest where I then carried the second rifle. They arrived late, as the morning had been bad, and they had waited until it cleared up. No previous arrangement had been made, so we all went together to where it was necessary to separate for the different beats. I stalked the lower beat. But how were the gentlemen to distribute themselves ? After some discussion

it was agreed to decide by the toss of a coin, the result being that it fell to the lot of the novice to accompany me.

The lower beat was usually less prolific in deer than the farther one, but on this occasion I considered my possibilities quite as favourable. The wind which had prevailed throughout the night generally pulled the deer into the lower corries, and in addition to this, deer disturbed on the upper beat were almost certain to come towards us. Starting at the farthest extremity of my ground, I wrought downwards, and was rather disappointed at seeing nothing. Only the lower corrie remained, and on getting on to the far shoulder of the hill I discovered a herd of at least two hundred hinds and stags. There were heavy bodies and good heads among them, but my attention centred on one. He was a ten-pointer, with long, even tines, while the cups at the tops of his horns were almost as perfect as I have ever seen. I have certainly beheld many better heads, but, for symmetry, I doubt if this one could be surpassed.

How to get near him, or in fact any of them, was the problem which now confronted me. The corrie stretched westward, with high hills on either side. Its top was fairly broad, and here the ground was lower. On the top was a flat about 100 yards broad, the corries of a grazing opening out beyond. Along this flat ran a sheep fence, which constituted our boundary. The herd covered the head of the corrie

and the adjoining part of the high hill on the opposite side. Thus from their elevated position the deer on the latter commanded a view of approach to the deer nearer me. The wind was not so unfavourable, being south-westerly ; but if I elected to stalk the farther deer, then the nearer ones would get it. Moreover, I knew from past experience that at the least disturbance they were only too apt to take the fence, and I dared not go after them into the sheep ground, as the grouse tenant was often on the look-out for a stag. Had the deer only occupied half the ground, I could have had an easy stalk ; as it was, one end of the herd safeguarded the other.

After due consideration I concluded it would be extremely hazardous to attempt a stalk as matters then were. I therefore decided to wait, in hopes that they might alter their position. It was after lunch-time, so we drew back from the brow of the hill, and proceeded to have lunch. We sat facing the high hill which formed the other side of the far corrie, to the base of which extended the low ridge which terminated that in which the deer were extended. Half our lunch was not consumed when about twenty stags appeared on the summit of the hill, galloping madly towards us. That they had been alarmed on the far beat I did not doubt.

In an instant I realised the significance of this new development. I knew the pace at which they were coming would carry them into

the corrie where the big herd lay. I also knew that their startled appearance would alarm the other deer, when almost certainly the whole lot would jump the fence, and we would be finished for the day. Almost certainly, too, the oncoming deer would keep close to the fence, and we were too far from it for a shot. Moreover, a shot where we were would almost certainly clear the other corrie. In addition to this they could not possibly pass without getting our wind, and that would add still more to their terror. Another disadvantage was that there was no cover where we were, the ground being quite bare, destitute either of rock or boulder.

This was a case for rapid decision and instant action if ever there was one. When the deer got to the base of the hill on which they were, a small depression would take them out of sight for not more than a minute. A considerable distance on our right front, and near the fence, were some deep peat-hags. Once the deer disappeared into the hollow I resolved to make for these. Pocketing the remains of our lunch, we waited until the deer entered the dip, and then dashed off, practically to meet them. I knew we should not have a single instant to spare, and we were both fleet of foot and ran our fastest.

Breathless and exhausted, we dropped behind the nearest peat-hag just as the first of the deer appeared on the level stretch before us. They came straight at us, but not quite

so fast as when I first saw them. As the wind was carrying towards them, to allow a near approach would be fatal. I therefore determined to risk a rather long shot, even though the abilities of my companion were unknown to me. Just as they reached the place where I deemed it necessary to shoot, a stag shied off from the others and paused. We could only see his chest, a difficult enough shot for an expert to hit ; but there was nothing else for it ; so I told the young gentleman to shoot, and not be long about it either. He did so, and I was gratified to see the stag drop where he stood. The others took the fence and disappeared down one of the grazing corries. Thus not only was a dangerous situation saved, but we had in addition scored a success.

Although I had never used the telescope, I was sure the stag was a good one. On going up to him I found that this was so. He had a wild, wide head of nine points, and he subsequently turned the scales at 16 stone. I calculated that the deer in the next corrie would have been a little alarmed by the sound of the shot, so, to give them time to settle, I had him gralloched and sent home.

This done, I returned to my previous point of vantage, expecting to see the big herd in a more favourable position. To my surprise and disgust, not a single deer seemed to have moved a yard. When we shot, the muzzle

of our rifle was turned away from them and they had not heard a sound.

The day was getting on, and something had to be done. Again I eyed the ten-pointer ; but alas ! he was beyond my reach. There were, however, good stags in the near end of the herd, and I decided to try a stalk. I had little hope of succeeding, but, if I failed, I considered the deer at this advanced hour would be less likely to take the fence, and instead would probably move farther down the corrie into a better position. I explained the circumstance to my companion, told him I did not expect to succeed, but that possibly we might get within long range, and asked him if he would risk a doubtful chance. He was willing, so the stalk began. We proceeded slowly and cautiously, taking advantage of every inch of cover, but despite the utmost care the deer saw us, as I expected they would. A part of them began to move off a piece of broken peat, and though a long way off, they offered a good broadside. Again there was not time to use a telescope ; but when I saw what I considered a good beast emerge on the peat, I told my companion to shoot. He did so, and the animal fell. He proved to be a six-pointer ; but though his head was inferior to that of the previous stag, he weighed a stone heavier—scaling 17 stone.

As we had had only one shot and showed ourselves as little as possible, the deer were

not much alarmed, and simply moved a little distance, as they frequently do in the evening. The position they took up was more favourable for a stalk, but being so numerous, they covered a wide area, which complicated matters a little bit. “ As we already have two good stags,” I said to the young gentleman, “ we have little to complain of. I shall, however, try another stalk, and this time let it be the ten-pointer or nothing.” “ Yes; let’s try for the ten-pointer ! ” he eagerly exclaimed.

As the deer were settling down, we again started, and with little difficulty got into the best position for a shot. Part of the herd were quite close to us, part completely out of range. Carefully using the telescope, I went over the whole ground two or three times, but could nowhere find the ten-pointer. At last I caught sight of his cups just showing out of a very small hollow. He was at least 200 yards away, but as my companion had shot extremely well for a novice, I determined to risk the chance. Making sure that his view was centred on the right spot, I told him he would have to be careful and do the best he could, as this would be the last chance for the night. Soon the stag emerged from the hollow, and as he offered a broadside, I instructed to shoot. The aim was not altogether perfect, for the bullet hit the stag too far back. He walked along the hillside, stopping at short intervals. As the other deer had moved off,

we got above him within easy range. Curiously enough, though the chance was good, the gentleman missed twice in succession, but the third shot proved fatal. The animal had a very handsome head, but was the lightest of the three, scaling only a few pounds over 15 stone. Thus ended what I considered one of my most successful day's stalking.

CHAPTER VII

MISSING AND "BROWNING"

ONE of the most memorable seasons I have ever had occurred early in my stalking career. The forest annually yielded between twenty and thirty stags, the average being twenty-three or twenty-four, but in the year in question our total bag numbered eight stags, and not a single decent one among them. This was not due to the want of deer, but to downright bad shooting. During the last week of the season I had thirty-one shots, and all I had to show for them was a single hind.

The lessee was a gentleman of at least sixty years of age, probably more, quite unfit for any prolonged physical effort. He had begun life with very moderate means, but by keen business instinct had ultimately amassed a considerable fortune. He had started his shooting career by leasing small moors, which gradually increased in size as he could afford the expenditure. He seems to have had an ambition for stalking, and this was not only the first forest he rented, but also his first attempt at stalking. He was

really a fairly good grouse shot, but of rifle-shooting he knew very little indeed. He had two rifles, one of which had belonged to Sir Samuel Baker, and on which he placed great reliance; but, however deadly it may have been in the hands of the great African explorer, it certainly was harmless enough in his. Although an abject failure as a deer-stalker, this man was a genuine sportsman and a thorough gentleman in every respect. He merely made the mistake of attempting to gain the unattainable by starting to learn stalking at an age when those who know what it means are thinking of giving it up.

We had certainly no lack of guests, but none of these were one whit better than their host—in fact, some were decidedly worse. In stalking I have noticed that the qualifications of guests in the main correspond pretty closely to that of their host. If the latter is a good stalker, most of his guests are the same; if deficient in the art, so, too, are those who visit him. Of course, exceptions are to be met with in both cases, but I have found the general principle to hold good.

Almost all the guests who visited the lodge were young men who never, or at most but seldom before, had had a rifle in their hands, and who knew absolutely nothing of the natural history of deer. “How do you distinguish stags from hinds?” was one of the questions asked by a new arrival on his first day out

with me. "By their horns," I replied. "Then hinds have got no horns!" was his rejoinder.

While out with another gentleman I showed him two lots of deer on an adjoining forest. Both herds were feeding quietly, one being much farther off than the other. After surveying them for a little, "Which of those two lots will be on our ground first?" he asked. The question was so absurd that I replied, "Well, the nearer lot have not got so far to come as the farther off one." He said no more, but the look he gave me indicated that he realised I had given a ridiculous answer. Probably it may have led him to understand that he had asked an equally ridiculous question.

Being young and keen, I was at first greatly annoyed by the unending succession of misses. Latterly I got regardless and adopted tactics I would never have thought of employing with any one conversant with even the veriest rudiments of deer-stalking. Never once but I did all I could to obtain the best possible chance, and, to begin with, selected only good stags. Realising how hopeless matters were, I pointed out inferior animals until in the end I even shot at hinds. It really made no difference. One beast was just the same as another to these gentlemen. They had all the interest of a stalk and a shot, and a hind answered the purpose, quite as well as the heaviest antlered stag. I remember once giving a gentleman a very good

chance, and he had several shots. As usual, nothing was hit. The gentleman was exceedingly disappointed. When all was over he said to me, "I would give £10 for those shots over again." I said nothing, but wondered if he would have been so lavish had he known of what kind were all the animals he shot at.

My recklessness in this respect once placed me in a very awkward position. My companion was a novice of novices, and we proceeded to stalk a herd of one hundred and fifty animals at least, and had little difficulty in getting within range. The deer occupied the top and side of a ridge over which I expected them to disappear when shot at, consequently I did not think we could use more than the contents of the double-barrelled rifle we carried, but in case of eventualities I carried two cartridges in my hand. Contrary to my calculations, at the first discharge the deer headed in a direction quite contrary to that which I had expected them to take, and moved off within range in a long single file. I re-loaded with the two cartridges in my hand, but, being quite unprepared, began searching my pockets for more. While doing so, "Is that a stag in the open ?" he whispered. "Yes," I replied, without once glancing in the direction of the deer. At that moment I found my ammunition, and at once directed my attention to matters in front.

At a glance the unpleasant possibilities of my rash reply came home to me. The "open"

was a break of about 10 yards in the line of deer, and right in its centre, well clear of every other animal, was "the stag"—in reality a wretched little calf, at which my companion undoubtedly had his rifle levelled. Like a flash I realised that, if he succeeded in killing this poor thing, the consequences to me were likely to be most unpleasant. Had the calf been running alongside other animals, and had been hit, he would not have been able to say whether or not he did not miss the beast he held at and got another. Running practically alone, if it fell, there could be no doubt but that it was the animal I directed him to shoot at. He would be disillusioned, and in his chagrin assuredly tell his host. What, then, would my employer say to me for making his guests shoot calves instead of stags? My intense anxiety only lasted for a few moments, but to me they seemed almost hours. At last the rifle spoke, and it was with a sigh of relief that I saw the calf continue the tenor of its way quite undisturbed. Where the bullet went I have not the faintest idea. The incident so deeply impressed me that never afterwards did I repeat any such experiment.

Another of this class of stalkers came without a sporting-rifle, and was supplied with one by his host. After getting several chances, all of which he missed, he became rather disgusted with his performance. Returning home one evening, he said, "I cannot shoot with that

rifle, but I have a small one with which I used to make good practice at a target. I feel sure I could hit a stag with it, but am not quite confident that it would kill. Do you think I could bring it?" "I really cannot tell," I replied. "Most of these small rifles are not meant for long ranges, but if it has sufficient penetration, and you can hit in a vital part, it might do if we could get well within a hundred yards." "It has good penetration, and I am sure it would kill up to about eighty yards at least. I shall bring it to-morrow," he rejoined.

Next morning he duly appeared, and elatedly showed me his new weapon. Its appearance at once filled me with dismay. I dare say it was a good enough gun of its kind, but it was nothing more than a "pea-shooter" with small projectile and no power behind it. That it would kill a stag even at close range I never expected, but so great was his faith in it that I did not care to dash his hopes, and agreed to let him try it. I, however, took the precaution to provide myself with the more serviceable weapon he had formerly used. Fortune favoured us that day, for we had an easy stalk, and got within about 60 yards of the deer. I pointed out a good stag standing broadside. He took aim and fired. In the perfect light that prevailed, I distinctly saw the bullet hit the beast fair and square on the shoulder. The stag may have been surprised and frightened, but otherwise

he was unhurt. I don't believe the small and powerless missile even damaged the skin. I could do nothing else but tell him his rifle was useless, when he again adopted his former weapon. We had other shots after, and that this rifle was not deficient in power, the dust its bullets sent out of the stones amply testified.

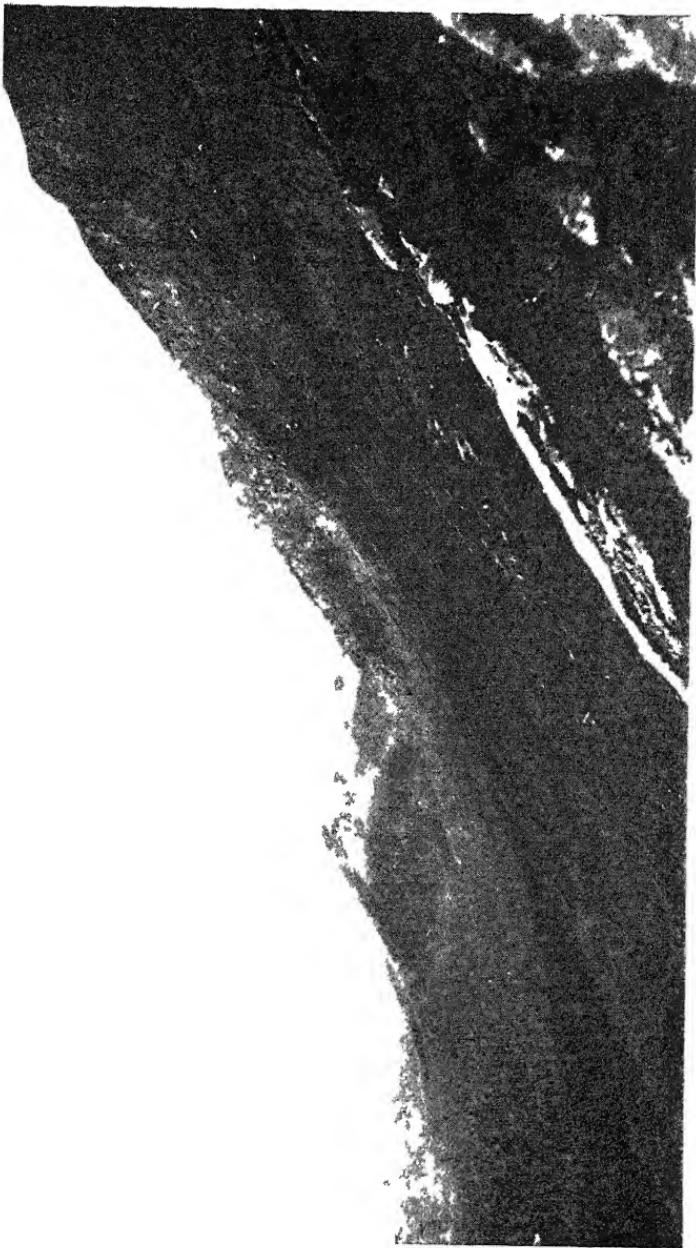
Poor marksman though he was, I believe the old lessee was the best shot we had that season, for, if I remember correctly, half the beasts that passed as stags fell to his rifle. He might have had one or two more had it not been for his fixed determination to finish every beast he hit. Now, for an aged man to attempt heading-off even a severely wounded stag is well-nigh attempting the impossible. It often takes a man in full possession of physical abilities to stop a wounded stag, to say nothing of the rapid snapshot when quite breathless, and even so wounded deer get away. Still, this old gentleman, who could only get about at a leisurely pace, stuck to the rifle, although he must have known by doing so he inflicted a lingering, painful death upon unfortunate animals. He was by no means the only one I have met who did so, and, strangely enough, most of these men were elderly and rather poor marksmen. On the other hand, many good shots in the prime of life made it a regular practice to hand over the rifle once a stag was wounded instead of themselves administering the *coup de grâce*.

All the stags we got were not those aimed at, and we had a few hinds besides, but why we had not more can only be due to wild shooting, for the bullets must have been over or under the whole herd. It is not improbable that after the first shot some of these young gentlemen shot into the "brown." To a novice the temptation to do this is great, for one beast appears a very small target when compared with the herd, and he considers there is always a chance of getting something good when there are several such in it. I am of opinion that such is very rarely the case. Of course, those that do so keep a discreet silence, but on the occasions on which I have suspected this practice to be adopted, nothing, or the poorest beasts in the herd, fell.

A good many years after this unlucky season, I was out with a gentleman who had not done very much stalking. We got up to a herd of about thirty stags in a deep corrie. The first shot missed, and the deer bunched together, so that perforce I had to select animals on the near side of the herd. After opening fire the gentleman seemed to lose his head, and began pumping lead at them as fast as he could load. To make matters worse, the deer could not make out where the shots were coming from, and, getting confused, kept running backwards and forwards in practically the same place. All my efforts to impress the desirability of taking more time were useless. The

[H. Frank Wallace]

LOOKING ALONG KINGIE FACE TO GLASS CORRIE



cover being good, the man who accompanied us had come up to the firing-point, and being somewhat surprised at results, or rather the want of them, I unreflectingly remarked to him, "I wonder something is not falling." The man gave no reply, but the gentleman who had overheard my remark responded as he again raised his rifle to his shoulder, "There will be presently, if I continue much longer." He was wrong. The deer got off without a single one being touched. I have a strong suspicion that he was firing into the whole lot of them and going over the whole lot.

Some years later I had an almost similar experience. Again the deer in the corrie failed to locate the spot from which the shots emanated, and became confused, though not to the same extent. The gentleman showed a decided inclination to adopt rapid fire, and I purposely delayed pointing out an animal for him to shoot at, urging the difficulty of selecting an individual beast in the rapidly changing herd. This proved to a certain extent successful, but I noticed that no sooner did I indicate a stag than he immediately raised the rifle and fired. As he was generally by no means quick in determining the desired animal among the moving deer, the apparent ease with which he did so on the present occasion made me rather suspicious. Eventually they got clear away, and as sound as before we had fired a shot.

Gazing after their retreating forms, he muttered more to himself than to me, "Isn't it extraordinary when one shoots into the 'brown' nothing falls?" This could only be regarded as meaning that not only had he done so, but also that he had adopted the same method on one or more previous occasions.

One of these possible occasions rushed to my recollection. When out with the same gentleman some time before I spotted a little lot of stags. They were all fairly decent beasts, and I resolved to stalk them. Just as we were on the point of starting I noticed a single hind approaching them at a pretty fast pace, and resolved to wait a little, being apprehensive that she might carry them off. She joined and remained with them, but they did not move above a hundred yards. When the gentleman realised she was to remain with the stags the curses he heaped on her devoted head were unstinted and unsparing. Why was this? Certainly it could not be because she increased the difficulties of the stalk, for the presence of one beast more could make little appreciable difference. I rather think it was because he had made up his mind to shoot into the "brown," when, if anything fell, it was of necessity bound to be a stag, whereas now there was the possibility of hitting that hind.

In my more juvenile days I can remember advising what practically meant shooting into

the "brown," but the experiment was not encouraging and not repeated. It was towards the end of November, and a London artist had come down for a week's hind-shooting. He was a young man, possibly had never seen a red deer in the wild state before, and certainly had never stalked any. He was keen and enthusiastic, but unfortunately his abilities did not correspond with his enthusiasm. In bad weather hind-shooting is far from an agreeable kind of sport. The weather had been very wet, and bare surfaces of peat were in a semi-liquid condition. The young gentleman did not relish going down amongst this matter, so cold to the hands, wet to the skin, and dirty to all it came in contact with. Owing to this reluctance, he failed to take full advantage of cover, with the result that the deer often saw him and moved off before we got into range. Despite such occasions we had numerous chances, but his shooting was erratic in the extreme.

He had begun shooting on a Monday; it was now Saturday and we had got nothing. It rather looked as if he was to return without getting blood. Having seen a large herd in a distant corrie, I was making for them, when a little lot, evidently somewhere disturbed, broke into view, heading straight towards us. They had not seen us, so, taking what cover I could get, I took out my telescope to examine them. I found them to consist of twelve hinds and one small stag—unlucky thirteen, some will say.

If they kept the same line of advance, I saw they would pass us within easy range, and prepared for a shot. They had evidently come a considerable distance, and, by the time they reached us, had reduced their speed to a walking pace. When immediately opposite us they stopped. So disgusted was I with his previous performances that the idea occurred to me that if I got him to shoot into their midst he would probably get something, and the chances were twelve to one it would not be the stag. I was also well aware that if I told him to shoot into the "brown," instead of at an individual beast, and he told my employer, as I considered he likely would, I was almost certain to hear more of it. If, however, instead of selecting an outside hind, I chose one in the centre of the group, it would be just the same to him, at least, and he would never suspect that I was actuated by any unexpressed consideration. I therefore directed him to shoot at a hind in the centre. Raising the rifle, he fired, and to my great disappointment the stag fell with a bullet through the neck. Odds of twelve to one were not enough to save him.

Only once can I recall good results of indiscriminate shooting into a herd. Two farmers had been granted a day's hind-shooting by the laird, who also owned a forest. Getting up into a large herd, they began by shooting at individual hinds, but got nothing. At last one remarked to the other, "We're to get

naething this way, Jock ; let's try a shot among the thick o' them." They did so, and dropped a hind each. And not only so ; but I doubt if the whole herd could have supplied two better animals.

CHAPTER VIII

TAXED RESOURCES

THE night had been wet, but rain had ceased, though the mist hung low down the corries in a dense pall. We were therefore later than usual in starting for the forest. To attempt stalking in mist, except, perhaps, when stags are roaring, is well-nigh a hopeless concern. More harm than good usually results, and the worst of it is that, owing to the obscurity, the harm done is never known. When certain climatic conditions prevail, mist may continue for weeks or more, and then it is better to leave the forest alone. On the other hand, there are conditions under which the fog may be of temporary duration. Following a wet night it frequently rises during the ensuing afternoon. Now, if one waits for it to rise before starting, darkness often sets in before a shot can be got; but if one is "on the spot" a stag can frequently be got. It was this view that influenced me on the morning in question. I considered there was a probability of its clearing, and resolved to penetrate a certain distance into the forest and there await developments.

At a fairly low elevation we waited until

midday was well past, when I thought I noticed indications of the mist lifting. I thereupon resolved to make for the head of a large corrie where I would have certain strategical advantages, among them a fairly extensive view should the atmosphere clear. And clear it did, just as we reached the summit. Almost immediately I saw a small lot of deer not far from us on the other or left side of the corrie, moving downwards at a rapid pace. I had little doubt but that we were the cause of their alarm—probably by starting an isolated hind. Down the corrie they went, and I now noticed another lot of similar number, right in their course, spring to their feet. Soon both lots combined, and the flight was continued, evidently with renewed alarm. A good bit farther ahead I noticed a third lot. They were near the side of a steep, narrow corrie that branched off at approximately right angles to the main one in an easterly direction. Seeing the other deer in flight, they, too, became alarmed, and without waiting for their approach, dashed across the mountain-spur on the near side of the small corrie and disappeared, the other deer following.

They had now three possible courses, and I decided to wait till I saw which they were to take. They could cross the small corrie and go straight ahead, they could climb its opposite side to the high ground beyond, or they could remain in the corrie. If they took the first, they would soon appear; if the second, they would take

longer, for the intervening ridge hid quite two-thirds of the opposite side ; and if they chose the third, I would not see them at all. I had just begun to think they had decided to remain in the corrie when the first files appeared moving up the opposite side. At its top was a peaty flat, and on gaining this they settled. They would now number over a hundred, and among them was only one really good stag. His presence was due to the fact that, it now being the latter half of September, the most forward of the big stags had begun to associate with the hinds.

The position they had taken up was somewhat strategical, as I knew from previous experience. Approach could only be made from the eastwards, and even then the farther part of the flat was out of range. Almost in the middle of this sombre-coloured expanse was a circular patch of light-coloured grass which was about the utmost limit of our range. It was so far satisfactory to see the deer spread out all round this, but the crucial question was—On which side of the grassy patch would the stag be ?

Hurrying over the considerable distance that lay between, I got as near the deer as possible. Some were within easy range, but the beast I wanted stood near the farther side of the herd and so far off that I felt very reluctant to advise a shot. Some small stags were well within range, and as I thought it possible that the larger animal might take it into his head to

drive these off, in which case he would offer a good chance, I resolved to wait. We therefore lay where we were for some time, but the deer showed not the slightest intention of leaving where he was. The sodden ground on which we lay had wet us to the skin, and a nip that had come into the air now began to make us feel chilly. As cold detracts from accurate marksmanship and as darkness was not now far distant, I began to think that to shoot was our wisest policy. Although the gentleman who accompanied me was a tolerably good shot, I must say that under existing conditions I scarcely expected him to hit. I felt, however, that we should be no better off by waiting, and by shooting now we might move the deer into a more favourable position, when with luck we might still have time for another stalk. My companion agreed that this was sound reasoning, and, though rather doubtful of the result, he shot. I can't say I was in the least disappointed to see the stag dash off unscathed.

Immediately on our left front the top of the hill rose to a considerably higher elevation. It was dome-shaped—the western side a perfect dome—destitute of boulder or ridge of any kind. Its eastern side somewhat lost the dome-shaped formation. From this hill the ground descended rapidly in a low ridge rising again to another hill at the far end, the whole forming a continuation of the eastern side of the main corrie. Between these two eminences a flat, peaty ex-

panse extended to another corrie farther east. The disturbed herd, I expected, would either swing continue downwards along the side of the main corrie or swing round on to this peaty flat, in either of which eventuality a shot might be got with little trouble.

After being shot at, the deer swept round the western side of the dome-shaped hill. To attempt stalking on a dome destitute of every vestige of cover is an almost hopeless task. Owing to the rounded formation of the ground, one can only see the nearest deer, and even then only the higher part of their bodies. To get far enough forward to obtain anything like a decent target necessitates exposure, and if a deer should look in the stalker's direction, the whole lot vanish. In such places the view is extremely limited, and one can pass a herd at a comparatively short distance without knowing they are there.

I followed the herd, but, as I expected them to take to lower levels, I inclined downhill. After a time, as I advanced, more and more of the side of the corrie came into view. When I reached the point where the dome lost some of its rounded nature without seeing deer in front of me, I felt they had swung round on to the flat beyond. I was just on the point of starting to look this ground when, glancing upwards and behind, I was astonished to see the whole herd standing looking at us. They must have stopped somewhere, and it was perfectly

evident we had passed quite close to them on the dome. They now stood on the sky-line, about 200 yards away.

They were rather huddled together, but towards their rear was a break of about 5 or 6 yards in their line. In the rear part stood the big stag. In a little the front deer began to move off, and at the same time the stag began to advance through the rear part, which stood still. If he continued, he would soon be in the open space. A peat-bank was beside us, so, adjusting the sights to what I considered the proper elevation, I handed the gentleman the rifle, telling him to lie down and to be ready to shoot the moment the stag showed clear in the open. On he came, the rest remaining stationary. "There he is!" I exclaimed; but the words were scarcely uttered when the rifle rang out. As it proved, the elevation was about perfect, but the bullet took effect too far back, breaking the hind leg high in the hip. In an instant all were out of sight, heading back in the direction from whence they came, but on the opposite or eastern side of the hill.

Of necessity we had to retrace our steps also, but on the other side of the hill from that taken by the deer. Being farther down the hill, it was some little time before we again saw the herd. They were standing within 100 yards of where they were first shot at, and just where the side of the little corrie began to descend steeply. All this side was perfectly bare and

grass-grown. Just at the rear of the herd the drainage of the flat accumulated and ran straight down to the burn at the bottom. In the course of ages it had cut deeply into the hillside, and now ran its whole course between high banks except near the confluence, where the matter it had carried down formed a miniature delta. A little below the herd and just beyond this streamlet stood the wounded stag and by him a smaller companion. Evidently his abilities were unequal to anything but a downward course.

The deer above precluded all possibilities of approach. No doubt they would move away in time, but darkness was closing in and we could not afford to wait. From where he stood the stag could only see the deer nearest him, and I considered it might be possible to move them away without disturbing him. I resolved at least to try. Going back a little, I went downhill, under cover of an intervening ridge, and eventually managed to get within sight of the herd while remaining hidden from the wounded animal. Here I managed to attract the attention of the deer, and by some manipulations make them suspicious, with the result that they finally moved off at a slow trot. Getting within view of the wounded deer, I was gratified to find that he still stood where he was, apparently quite unconscious of the departure of his companions. To attempt stalking him by going straight ahead from where we were simply

meant putting him away, as we would be in full view all the time. We had to swing round the opposite side of the hill and approach on the lower ground that led to where the streamlet began. We went carefully down between the steep banks until I reached a spot which I considered level with the place where the stag stood. So sure was I of a shot that I got the rifle ready, warned the gentleman not to hang too long over his aim, and to shoot low. I then carefully looked over the bank to see the exact position of the stag. The sight that met my eye filled me with dismay. From about 50 yards in front, and stretching away beyond, was the whole herd I had congratulated myself on rather cleverly getting rid of. How they came to be there, I had not the faintest idea. The move was an altogether unexpected one. All my previous and, as I thought, successful manœuvres were brought to nothing.

But this was not the time to seek explanations. The question that demanded immediate attention was—Where was the wounded stag? I felt certain he would be among the nearer deer, so, getting out my telescope, I proceeded to look for him. The attempt was futile; it was now too dark to see anything distinctly through the glass. I next watched with bare eyes in hopes of seeing some animal move with a limp. In this, too, I failed. “It’s no use,” whispered my companion; “we are beaten, and we may as well go home.” Just at that moment a last

forlorn hope occurred to me. It was a very slender chance, but still a chance, and I resolved to put it in execution. "Come on," I said, and we hurried downwards under cover of the steep bank until just level with the deer. "Get on to the top of the bank and tell me when you are ready to shoot," I said. "If you get a shot at all, aim at the ground below the animal's body."

When he indicated that he was ready, I sprang on top of the bank and gave a loud halloo. The startled and alarmed deer rushed uphill pell-mell. They had not gone ten yards when one beast dropped behind. This was exactly what I calculated would happen. No animal severely wounded in a hind limb can keep pace with sound deer in a rapid uphill flight. "There he is, last; shoot!" I exclaimed. He did so, but without any result. "Again," I said, and again the rifle rang out. Although I could not see it, the second bullet was bound to have hit the ground in front of the stag, for he immediately wheeled and headed for the burn at the far end of the deepest part of the corrie. At the place he was making for not only were both sides of the corrie high and steep, but its end was equally so through a huge mass thrusting itself forward over which the water tumbled from the higher levels beyond. That the hard-hit stag would attempt to climb any of these steep ascents was out of the question.

"Go right down to the very edge of the burn at the bottom and wait," I said to the gentleman. "The stag is unable to climb; I'll go and drive him down to you. Take cover at the very edge of the burn, and if he comes you cannot miss him, dark though it is, for he will be within ten yards of you. Now hurry." Off he set at a good pace, while I went off on the course the stag had taken. I had not covered much more than two-thirds the distance to the top of the corrie when two rifle shots in rapid succession rang out at the confluence of the streams. Evidently the stag had not waited to be driven down, but had the gentleman got him? Two shots sounded none too well, but that there were no more seemed a little reassuring. I was not long in being where the shots were fired. I found my companion in high spirits, and the stag lying dead in the middle of the burn. The first shot had missed, but the second proved fatal.

On dragging him out of the burn I was surprised to find that both hind legs were broken, one of them certainly not by a bullet. Examination satisfied me that this break had occurred between the firing of the first and second shot. The limb was fractured low down, the sharp point of bone just protruding through the skin. That it had not come in contact with the soil was clear. The animal must have swerved when the first shot was fired, and as the ground he traversed was very rough, his foot must have

caught between two stones, hence the break. As I had lost all trace of the pony, we had to leave him lying where he was until next day, so we proceeded homewards, pleased that we had at last successfully overcome difficulties that more often than not once threatened to be too much for us.

On reaching the lodge we found the pony-man there before us. I at once proceeded to question him as to his proceedings, and soon found out why the herd of deer came to rejoin the wounded stag. The man had remained under cover a long way behind but watched our movements through a telescope. He had seen us shoot, saw the deer disappear round the hill, and us follow after them. Waiting for some little time and seeing nothing further, he concluded we had followed the deer into a lower corrie, and came after us. That they would turn back was the last thing he expected, especially as we were behind them. Shortly after starting he had a fairly long flat to cover, a ridge in front taking the dome-shaped hill out of his view. After surmounting the ridge he had another flat to traverse with a second elevation obscuring all in front. He must have been under cover of the first ridge when the deer broke back, and little more than under the second, if indeed he had surmounted the first, before we crossed the hill, intent on our stalk. In any case, he met the herd full in the face on their outward journey after I had moved them

away. It was then they turned back and rejoined the wounded animal. Quite unconscious of our proximity, and with darkness falling, he had continued his journey home. The man could not be blamed, for the circumstances were exceptional.

CHAPTER IX

MAKE-BELIEVE

STALKING gentlemen who get up into years labour under a double handicap. In the first place, they are unable to cover the same distance as before, consequently their number of chances is reduced. Then their eye is less clear, their hand less steady, and erratic markmanship is the consequence. When corpulency is added to age, matters are worse. Now, in all grades of society, people are found who stoutly deny physical deterioration in its earlier stages. Even though approaching the proverbial "threescore years and ten," they maintain they are as good as ever they were. Some, I am convinced, actually think so. No doubt the first inroads of failing physical abilities are very insidious and may fail to be recognised, but the process does not continue long before it should become apparent to every observant person. In all cases a time comes when it forces recognition, unless death intervenes. There are, however, men of different mentality—men who undoubtedly realise physical decline, but who assert they are "as good as ever, my boy," and at

the same time adopt every subterfuge to conceal their failing abilities, as if such were something to be ashamed of. They seem to think that physical decline is a disgrace, and overlook the fact that it is the inexorable fate of all, provided they live long enough.

It has been my lot to accompany more than one stalking gentleman over a period of years just when this change was taking place and to note the progress. In general terms it may be described as follows : A gentleman has been for years a tolerably good shot. By and by a good chance is missed at intervals. The gentleman cannot account for it, but comes to the conclusion that in some way he must have been to blame himself. Misses become more frequent, and he begins to look for some other reason to account for them. The ammunition or the rifle may be defective, but quite as often as otherwise it is the stalker who is to blame. In a few years misses become as frequent as hits, probably more so, and it is at this stage that the actions of the different mentalities come into prominence.

If a gentleman whom I once stalked to did not find consolation, he at least found explanation by generally laying all the blame for his bad shooting on my shoulders. One stalk I can remember well. We got up to a herd of deer without making them in the least suspicious. Anxious to make as sure as possible of what I knew to be anything but a certainty, I told the

gentleman that the stag I pointed out was as nearly as I could calculate a hundred yards distant, but, as it was a downhill shot, to aim low. He made no demur, but when he fired I saw the bullet graze the stag's back. Irritated at the result, he at once exclaimed, "Call that a hundred yards, do you ? I call it much nearer two hundred." "That may be so, sir," I replied, "but it's a pity he was not even farther off. Your bullet only just cleared his back; had he been a little farther out in all probability you would have got him."

That, of course, ended the discussion, but there were times when he became altogether unreasonable. On such occasions I considered it prudent to walk away and leave him to follow, accompanied by the man who attended us. The latter then had to listen to a detailed account of all my faults and shortcomings, but this did not disturb me in the least. When I thought the gentleman had recovered his equanimity, I allowed him to overtake me. As a rule, he never referred again to stalk or excuses, but inquired as to what was to be done next.

As I have said, when missing became frequent, gentlemen would show their different mentalities. One class realised what was wrong, and frankly owned up to it. Another class acted quite differently. Used to bringing into the larder quite as large a proportion of stags as any one at the lodge, they took badly to falling behind. As the number of stags which

fell to their rifles gradually diminished, they cast about for means of regaining what they considered their lost prestige. This was generally accomplished by enlisting the services of the stalker. The latter was, of course, sworn to silence, and all the gillies, except perhaps some trusted individual, were kept in the dark.

Generally the gentleman took the first shot and then handed the rifle to the stalker. In certain emergencies, however, the stalker's assistance was requisitioned to begin with. In these cases the gentlemen sought to deceive their stalking companions but not their stalker. Only once did I come across a gentleman who sought to deceive both. Make-believe is perhaps a more appropriate term than deception, for it is difficult to see how the methods adopted could deceive any one. Well do I remember how I failed to pick up his meaning when the plan was first put in operation.

We had got up to a herd of deer and I pointed out to him the stag I wanted him to shoot at. No sooner had the first shot gone off than the second followed. The first shot inflicted a mere flesh wound, and the second I put down as a miss, thinking he had fired at the same stag. This he denied, asserting that he had shot at another and claiming to have wounded him. Of course I did not know what he had shot at or with what result, as my attention had been fixed on the first deer fired at. The herd was, however, a considerable time in sight, and I

watched them narrowly, but not one could I detect whose movements were impeded in the slightest degree. We were finished with them for the time being, and I thought the incident was at an end. In this conclusion I found I was wrong.

"We've had a hard day," he said on parting with me that evening. "I'm no longer as young as I used to be, and much easier tired out. I think I shall rest to-morrow, so you can take the rifle and go and look for these wounded stags." In reply I gave him to understand that I regarded success in this enterprise as pretty nearly hopeless. "Nonsense," he rejoined; "they cannot have gone far. You are certain to get one of them at least." Next morning I therefore set out alone. From the start I knew my quest was useless, but I looked over the ground more for the sake of seeing what was on it than with any hopes of finding a wounded stag. On informing him of my failure that night he became, or pretended to become, very angry. He could not understand why I had not got one of the wounded beasts; I had not examined the ground closely enough, and so on. I said little in reply, for his demeanour had called forth an idea that had not occurred to me before.

About a week later he shot at an eight-pointer, and owing to some circumstances which I forget, I could not tell with what result. He claimed that the stag was badly hit, but of this I had

my doubts. That night I was deputed to look for him on the morrow, and given to understand that I was expected to be more successful than I had been on the previous occasion. I thought there was every probability that I would be. I had no doubt that he intended me to shoot any stag and pass it off as his wounded one. The beast, however, required to be an eight-pointer, and, though plenty of stags were on the ground, I could see no head at all resembling the one we had shot at on the previous day.

I was almost in despair when, just before evening, I noticed one that would do. He was right at the far side of a large herd that were extended almost from the burn at the bottom of a corrie to half-way up the hillside. The ground was very smooth, and the closest approach I could possibly make barely placed me within range of the highest deer. How was I to get the animal I wanted ? Night was approaching, something had to be done, and done at once if I was to escape another failure and another reprimand. At last I hit upon a plan that offered some chance of success. It was only a chance, and I doubt if I would have tried it if I had been stalking to a gentleman. Just across the burn from the lower edge of the herd a considerable area was covered with stones. I felt I could not hit the stag at such a distance, but was confident I could place a bullet somewhere among those stones. If I did

so I thought a deer would come towards me, more than likely crossing a long ridge that sloped away on my left. If they crossed any part of the ridge I knew I could meet them.

I therefore put my scheme in operation. Calculating the distance as well as I could, I fired. The bullet hit the stones, raised a cloud of dust, and went away humming. This attracted the attention of the deer, and they dashed uphill, some distance on my left. I had just got within comfortable range behind a peat-bank when the leading files appeared. I knew the stag I wanted would be among the last, so I waited for him, watching through my telescope. Finally I distinguished him, and, laying down my glass, took up the rifle. In this short interval a posse of small beasts got between and remained there, completely covering them. Gradually he was getting farther and farther off. It looked as if I were to lose him after all. Eventually he dropped so far behind that I could see half his body. In a little he would be clear, but more deer were close behind and gaining ground. I could afford to wait no longer, so, taking as good aim as I could, I pulled. The bullet hit, but in the failing light I could not tell where. The shot caused the herd to accelerate their pace, but the wounded stag fell behind, when I was lucky enough to stop him with a shoulder hit. The first bullet I found had just passed in front of the curve of the haunch and penetrated the small intestines. A

different reception awaited me that night. I was heartily congratulated, and the other gentlemen in the lodge were brought into the larder to see the stag. Addressing them, he said, "I knew he was hard hit and could not go far, but I can't understand how I got him quite so far back ; elevation all right, too"—and he pointed out the hole my first bullet had made. Surely I was lucky, for only then did it flash on me that the carcass required to show two bullet holes.

This gentleman had married rather late in life a lady considerably younger than himself. The lady now took it into her head to go deer-stalking. The proposal did not meet with her husband's approval, but in the end she had her own way. As she had never stalked before or even held a rifle, a little preliminary target practice was considered essential. The result of this was by no means reassuring, but it did not damp the lady's ardour in the smallest degree, the day appointed finding her in the forest. I have often wondered why it is that really good chances at really good stags so often come in the way of those who cannot take them. I almost walked the lady up within easy reach of a very nice "royal." The result was what I fully expected : she missed him clean. It was a very disconsolate lady who returned to the lodge that night, and I'm afraid she did not receive much consolation there. Her husband rated her soundly, could not understand why he had been

so foolish as to let her go, and lamented that he had not been there himself. Within myself, I thought that he had little room for censure.

About a week later I was again sent out to look for a "wounded" stag. I had less difficulty in finding this one, for, profiting by past experience, I, as far as possible, avoided definitely stating how many points were carried by stags shot at. I was again congratulated on my success, and the stag duly examined and admired. The lady was brought out to see him, and as she and her husband were going indoors she turned and said, "I'm so sorry I did not send you after my 'royal'; I'm *sure* you would have found him." This was indeed getting her own back with vengeance. There could be no shadow of doubt she suspected what was happening. The remark made me uncomfortable, for I could see the possibility of trouble ahead. My fears were, however, groundless. Whether or not the lady said anything more to her husband I do not know, but sure it is I was never afterwards dispatched to look for a "wounded" stag.

Although the above described method was thus shelved, the resources of ingenuity were by no means exhausted. It must not be understood that this gentleman missed the majority of his chances. Certainly he missed oftener than was desirable, but often, too, he wounded stags more or less severely. On such occasions I was handed the rifle after all the immediate chance was gone, and sent in pursuit. The slightly wounded

deer often got away, but I generally managed to secure those that were pretty hard hit. Many a long and trying race I had after them. These and other excessive exertions told on me bit by bit, though I did not feel them at the time, until ultimately my heart gave way, and I became little better than an invalid at an age when otherwise I might have had several years of usefulness before me. Heart trouble is more or less of a "trade disease" with stalkers, and although I certainly do not recommend laziness, over-exertion should be guarded against.

One evening, when returning home after I had experienced considerable trouble in stopping a wounded stag, the gentleman said, "I am sorry my bad shooting causes you such a great deal of hard work. Do you know, I have been thinking it would be much better if you took a rifle yourself. If I happened to wound a stag which you thought was likely to get away, you might be able to stop him before he got out of range. I could then try for another and you might be saved a hard grind." To this proposal I, of course, offered no objection. At the same time I quite realised he would be none too fastidious as to what constituted a wounded stag.

I really forgot all that happened after this plan was adopted. I can only recall the last occasion on which it was put into operation, and of that I have a vivid recollection. We had got within range of a considerable number of

deer that, all unconscious of our presence, were feeding about on a piece of rising ground. We could therefore select almost any animal in the herd, as the rise in the ground nearly cleared each animal from any other that stood between. The two best stags were about in the centre, but my attention was attracted to one, only a very little inferior, which stood on the edge of the herd nearest to us. I realised that if we shot at a stag in the middle of the herd the deer would close in upon him, thus making a second shot impossible. On the other hand, the stag on the outside would more than likely run clear long enough for another shot to be got in. I therefore resolved to try for him. I indicated my choice, the gentleman fired, and I saw him hit a calf immediately over the stag's back. As I expected, he ran clear, affording plenty of time for a good aim, and I saw my missile take him in a vital part. Just at that moment the stricken calf fell. "You've got a calf," said my companion. "Looks rather like it," I replied. The stag ran for about 20 yards and also dropped. "He's down, I knew he couldn't possibly go far," was the next remark addressed to me. On going up to the dead stag the bullet hole had to be found. After it was located he said, "Isn't it wonderful how far an animal will travel with a bullet through the heart." Matters now assumed a very pleasant aspect, which they certainly would not have done had I declared the real state of affairs. I have since

wondered if he really thought he hit that stag, or if it was only make-believe. Or did he think he had outwitted me ?

Something at the lodge must now have aroused his suspicions, for that was the last occasion on which I was asked to carry a second rifle. He had probably kept a discreet silence about the second rifle, and it had somehow got to be known. If so, in all probability the lady had seized the opportunity for getting on level terms for the rating she got over missing the "royal."

After that I was always handed the rifle and sent in pursuit of any stag that got away wounded. Now, if a wounded deer sees his pursuer he moves directly away, and consequently keeps his stern to you. The result is, if you shoot and hit, you are almost bound to take him in the haunch. I know I almost invariably did, and almost as invariably did I get into trouble for doing so. I thought the censure uncalled for, but did not allow it to prevent me from trying to stop a wounded deer—I was often only too glad to get a hit anywhere.

CHAPTER X

MUTUAL DECEPTION

I NOW come to an incident unique in my experience, as I believe it would be in the experience of almost every deer-stalker. I must admit I practised deception to gain my end, but even yet I can scarcely express regret, as I did so for no personal benefit. In the first flush of success I congratulated myself that I had completely hoodwinked the gentleman to whom I was stalking, but calm consideration led me later to believe that he had been as intent on deceiving me as I had been on deceiving him. The curious part is, that if I am correct in my surmise, we both adopted the same means at the same time, and both attained the same end. I will, however, narrate the whole proceedings and let the reader form his own conclusions.

It was in the last half of September and one of those days that sometimes occur at this season. The sun shone bright and warm from a cloudless sky, while a gentle, soft, south-westerly breeze made conditions agreeable and pleasant. Somewhat similar weather had ex-

isted for a few days, and I did not expect to find deer except in the high flats or the upper recesses of the corries. I therefore pushed on to the top of a high flat-topped hill at the very extremity of our ground. Immediately to the north was another forest, to the east a third, all three meeting just a little beyond where we stood. Beneath us was a big corrie, all of which, with the exception of a few small hollows, I could see for a distance of about two miles. This corrie had a comparatively flat bottom, but the side rose rather steeply to the foot of the almost perpendicular descent, on the top of which we were. On this ascending ground lay a herd of about fifty deer. They, too, were enjoying the fine weather, for not a few lay on patches of raw peat with legs and necks outstretched on the cool substance. Among them were a few stags of average weight and head. A little in front of us the head springs of the stream that drained the corrie had cut deeply into the soil until just level with where the deer lay, when the banks terminated, giving place to comparatively level sward. I could have an easy stalk and an easy shot at an average beast. Taking everything into consideration I resolved to stalk.

We practically walked up to the spot from which we were to shoot. The best stag lay about the middle of the herd, but offered so poor a mark that I resolved to wait his rising. As it might be some time before he arose we

lay under the bank conversing in whispers, but ever and anon I raised my head to see the deer, in case the unexpected might happen. And happen it did. Looking over the bank I was surprised to see every deer standing and staring in our direction. I was certain we were not the cause of their alarm, but this was not the time for investigation, as the chance of a shot might occur at any moment. I got the gentleman into position and, though the stag was completely covered, had hopes that he might be exposed when the move that was bound to follow occurred. It was not to be. After standing like statues for a little the whole herd wheeled as if actuated at the same instant with one impulse and dashed down the corrie full gallop, offering no possibility of a shot.

Looking round, the cause of the disturbance was easily seen. Rushing down the hillside behind us was a herd of quite a hundred deer. They must have come off one of the two adjoining forests, and that they had been badly frightened was apparent. As they advanced they descended more towards the bottom. The lot we had stalked converged towards them, with evident intention of joining, which they eventually did by crossing the burn and ascending a short distance up on the other side. Soon afterwards their pace slackened to a walk, and some began taking a mouthful of grass as they walked. So crowded together were the newcomers that I could not make out individual

heads, but all the same, I felt convinced that among them were better animals than we had previous to their advent.

We had now to retrace our steps to the head of the burn and proceed along the hilltop above and beyond them. I calculated they were likely to proceed right down the corrie, and if so the configuration of the ground would take them a considerable time out of our sight just before we reached the place where I thought it probable we might get a shot. I therefore considered it prudent to see what they were doing before entering upon this hidden stretch. Getting to a point that commanded a view I saw them progressing just as I had expected. A little distance ahead of them and about half-way up the hill-side was an outcrop of rock that continued in a straight line for about half a mile. They would certainly pass between these rocks and the burn. The deer were now grazing and widely spread, but I knew that if I could gain the farther end of these rocks before they had passed from being immediately underneath I would be within range of all except perhaps the very lowest.

Beyond the rocks the ground got so smooth that a stalk was altogether out of the question. Could I reach the desired spot before them? They were moving forward pretty fast, and I knew it would be all we could do and at best a near thing. As all the deer were in view I thought it better to run the telescope over the

stags in order to know which was the best. I did not think I would see all the deer at the same time again, and if I could distinguish the best it might enable me to avoid waiting or even allow him to pass out of range, awaiting the appearance of an expected better, and thus have eventually to take an inferior animal. I had no difficulty in selecting the stag I wanted. There was one infinitely superior to all the others. I could easily recognise that massive head, so making no attempt to count the points I shut up the telescope and started, my anxiety now being to reach the desired spot in time.

Needless to say I hurried forward as fast as the gentleman was fit to follow, and I must admit chafing a little because he was unable to increase his speed. He was, however, doing his best, and eventually we got straight above the far end of the rocks. I could now see right down to the burn, and was so far gratified to find that not a deer was visible. We had but a comparatively short distance to descend, and once at the rocks could see right away back and could wait until the stag came forward. My hopes were high, but alas ! we had covered no more than half the intervening distance when the heads of two stags appeared close to the base of the rock. Of course we dropped at once, and fortunately we were caught where cover was fairly good. We were decidedly unfortunate to be thus cut off from the "little

more " that made all the difference, and that, too, just when it seemed assured.

From where we lay I could see past the end of the rock and the nearer the burn the further back. Soon the lower part of the herd began to come into view, and latterly the big stag appeared. Much to my disappointment he was near to the farthest edge of the herd. A close and leisurely scrutiny through the telescope enhanced the opinion I had already formed of the animal. He was in every way a fine stag, and as I viewed him I became obsessed with a desire to have him into the larder that night, and resolved not to be too particular as to the means by which this was to be accomplished. How this was yet to be done I had not the remotest idea, but the day was not yet spent, and I hoped that the chapter of accidents might give me an opportunity—if not, it might be possible to make one. I pointed him out to my companion, and he was even more impressed with the animal's fine head than I was.

As he kept advancing, every now and again I noticed him turn his horns back to his haunches as if something there was irritating him. On his reaching a point almost straight under us, and the formation of the ground on which he stood bringing him into a favourable position, I easily made out what was annoying him. Right across the top of his back, above the forepart of the haunches, was a long red weal. A bullet had evidently here cut the skin and little if any-

thing more. That it had been recently done was apparent, for the wound was raw and the hair on either side red with blood. This then accounted for the alarm of the incoming herd. They had been shot at on one of the two adjoining forests, and I could not help thinking that some one must be feeling particularly sore.

No sooner did I see the wound on the stag's back than it occurred to me that I might be able to turn it to good account. If I could get the gentleman to shoot at him I could then point out the wound to him, when, I had no doubt, he would hand me the rifle, and once in possession of it fortune would indeed be against me if I did not get the stag. There were at least two possibilities, either of which would frustrate the plan. If the stag kept anywhere near to the line of march he was pursuing, even at the nearest he would be a very long shot. So far off indeed would he be, that I felt confident he would remain untouched. But that did not trouble me in the least. My annoyance arose from serious doubts as to whether the gentleman would shoot at all at such a distance. He had, not without reason, a marked aversion to anything in the nature of long shots, and as there were perfectly good stags quite close to us he might prefer the greater certainty of taking one. Then at any moment he might catch sight of the blood which glowed red in the brilliant sunshine. I took a side glance and saw his glass

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—a much more powerful one than mine—glued on the stag. How he did not see the blood I knew not, but evidently it escaped his observation.

At last the crucial moment arrived; the stag was at his nearest. I knew better than insist upon his taking the longer shot, for if we failed to get a stag then there was trouble in store for me. So I said: “You will now have to shoot, sir, for the deer are beginning to get farther away. The best stag is the long shot, but the one nearest us is a fairly good beast, though not for a moment to be compared with the other.” “He’s the devil of a long way off, but I’ll try him,” was the reply given with no hesitation. Laying down the telescope he picked up the rifle, and taking careful aim, he fired. The result was a miss, as I expected, and though I watched keenly I saw no sign of the bullet hitting anywhere. The deer rushed together, and stood uncertain from whence the shot came and undecided in which direction to go.

Picking up the telescope the gentleman trained it on the herd. Scarcely was it at his eye when he exclaimed: “He’s hit. There can be no doubt about it. Don’t you see the blood on his back?” “I see it,” I replied. “Take the rifle,” he said, “and nip off after him; I’m too old for that game now.” To what an unusual extent Fortune has favoured me, I thought! That my companion should view the

stag for so long a time before he shot without seeing the blood, when he had every opportunity of doing so, and yet see it so quickly after he had shot, when it was much more difficult of observation, was luck indeed. Moreover, though I had certainly intended to deceive, he had forestalled my opportunity of doing so. "Lie still where you are, then, until the deer are out of sight. Otherwise you will spoil my chance," I said, as I picked up the rifle and made off.

The ridge immediately above us was saddle-shaped, descending from a hill behind and rising to the top of a lower one in front. My first objective was to get over the ridge in the lower part of the saddle which would take me out of sight of the deer. Before crossing the ridge I looked back to see what the deer were doing. By this time they were in motion and heading for a point some distance beyond the top of the hill in front. Beyond the top of this hill the ground declined rapidly. Some distance down the decline on the side facing the corrie were two terrace-like formations comparatively close to each other. One or other of these terraces I expected the deer to take. Both lost their formation immediately before reaching the ridge which ran in an unbroken line; but though I could not see them from the side on which I was, I knew exactly where they terminated. I rather thought they would be no higher than the lower terrace, perhaps not so

high, so I made for the place where it ended as the most strategical point of vantage. But could I reach it before the deer ? I was very doubtful, as I had the hill to surmount, but pushed on as fast as I was able.

Reaching the top of the hill, I could see right down the ridge, and was gratified to find that not a deer was in sight. I got to the end of the first terrace without a sign of them, then the end of the second, and still they came not. Here I paused to regain breath. The deer should have been forward by now. They must either have stopped or gone in some other direction. I was just on the point of moving forward over the ridge when, glancing upwards, I caught sight of the heads of three or four hinds just a little short of the top of the hill. They saw me as soon as I saw them, and at once doubled back. If I had only remained at the top !

Regrets were useless, so, hurriedly viewing the new situation, I acted at once. That the deer would now seek outwards, passing a little higher up than the place we shot from, I felt certain. If they did so my chance was irretrievably lost. But this I did not think they would do. I had little doubt but that the gentleman would lie where I left him until the deer passed out of his sight, and that he would then rise and follow after me. If so, when the herd broke back into view they would assuredly see him as soon, if not sooner, than he would see them, for he

would be expecting no such movement. They would then divert their course to the eastward, but at what point I was uncertain. The likelihood was that it would be rather less than half-way between the top of my side of the saddle and the lower part. If so, I might be able to get a shot from a large boulder surmounting a rise in the ground some little distance beyond the top, could I reach it in time. It was an uphill course, but in those days I was fleet of foot and strong of lung and I did my utmost.

In a very short time I reached the stone and found the deer had followed the line I had anticipated. The front of the herd were out of range ; the latter part were not, and fortunately the big stag was well in the rear. He was moving along broadside through some peat-hags. Taking hurried aim I fired. That I hit was evident as his pace dropped to a slow walk. I gave him the other barrel, but he did not seem to take the slightest notice of it. It was the double rifle, so I reloaded and had another shot. No appreciable result followed, he still kept moving forward at the same pace. I was raising the rifle for a fourth shot when he lay down in a peat-hag which concealed all but the tips of his horns. Attracting the attention of the gentleman, who had again lain down, I signalled to him to join me. This he did, when I took him through the peat-hags until close on the stag, when I gave him the rifle, when he

finished off with a bullet through the neck. Curious to know the result of my shots, I examined the carcass and found all three had hit within 3 inches of each other, low in the belly underneath the short rib. I had underestimated the distance by more than 100 yards.

Now, though not expressly stated in words, my intention was deception, which undoubtedly would have been practised to the utmost had the necessity for so doing arisen. The gentleman's behaviour had favoured my plan, but after consideration convinced me he was not the innocent I had taken him for. Why, after a long and careful survey, had he not seen the easily discernible wound before shooting ? Why had he so readily agreed to fire a shot at which he had always cavilled ? He was bad at distinguishing an individual stag where deer stood close together, yet with the greatest ease he had not only identified an animal in a closely packed herd, but had also noted the wound under rather adverse conditions. After due consideration I came to the conclusion that he must have seen the bullet track across the stag's back before shooting, and that he had there and then made up his mind to practise the same deception upon me as I had resolved to practise upon him. I doubt much if he saw the stag in the herd after shooting. He simply knew the animal must be there, and that was sufficient. Of course, I have nothing tangible

to go upon, but the dodges he had previously resorted to proved him quite capable of this little manœuvre. Be that as it may, we got what ultimately proved the best stag of the season.

CHAPTER XI

A RECORD OF ECCENTRICITIES

IN the course of a lifetime's stalking one naturally comes across gentlemen of marked peculiarities and eccentricities. As far as these personal traits apply to stalking I have found their possessors to be not necessarily or often young men, but generally those of middle age. I have noticed too that such men have often risen to affluence through sheer business capacity. In early life they could neither have had time or money for participating in this form of sport, and when increasing riches and leisure enabled them to rent a forest, they pretended to an experience they did not possess, and thus in vulgar parlance "gave themselves away."

One of the earlier forest lessees I served was obsessed with an idea of his own abilities. He arrived some little time before stalking began, and regaled me with accounts of his numerous clever exploits. Some of these I can recall still. One day he was out with a party of sportsmen. When many miles from home they were caught in one of those short but heavy downpours of

rain that often accompany a summer thunder-storm. The weather had been fine, and none of them had provided themselves with water-proofs. No shelter of any kind was at hand, and a thorough drenching therefore was imminent. Leaving his friends he proceeded to the edge of a burn that ran near by, stripped off all his clothing, put it under protecting stones, and went into the deep pool up to the neck. When the rain was over he emerged and put on his dry clothes. Thus on the homeward journey he was dry and comfortable while his friends were soaked to the skin. Very clever !

I remember, too, he described to me the conditions of a certain race. The distance was 100 yards. One man started scratch, while another got fifty yards start, but had to carry a third person on his back. "The fifty yards man always wins," he said. "I never saw the scratch man win but once, and then I did it myself." I surveyed the speaker, and thought if so, how greatly he must have changed since his youthful days.

"I once wagered with a friend I would put a bullet through a penny placed against a tree trunk," he said on another occasion. "On taking my stand (I forgot the distance) I said that a penny would not do as I could not see it distinctly, and asked him to put up a half-crown instead. He did so, and I put the bullet right through its centre. Of course I saw the penny

quite well, but I wanted to spoil his half-crown."

Tales such as these failed to impress me with a high opinion of either his veracity or his marksmanship, and after events proved the soundness of my suspicion. The first stag I stalked to him stood broadside on the far side of a steep gorge. He was little if any more than 100 yards off, and the bullet took him well back in the haunch. Fortunately he got the stag, and at first my friend was rather nonplussed to account for such a wide shot. Eventually, however, he arrived at (to himself) a perfectly satisfactory explanation. His bullet had to cross the gorge in question, and he had forgotten to allow for the stiff breeze that would naturally blow down such a confined space. The wind had carried the missile, hence it hitting so far from the spot aimed at.

This gentleman could by no means be termed a good rifle-shot, yet he declared, "I am never surprised if I hit, but very much so when I miss," and it was a matter of the greatest difficulty to convince him that he had done so. Every stag that got away after he had shot at it, he asserted was hit, and he was by no means backward in declaring that neighbouring sportsmen bagged his wounded deer, while he kept us constantly searching for these mythical beasts.

I remember once he hit a stag on the withers. The animal dropped like a stone, lay for a little,

struggled to his feet, and began to stagger about. From previous experience I knew that he would soon be as fleet as ever, and urged my companion to shoot again. This he indignantly refused to do, declaring that he would never disgrace himself by shooting at a dying animal. The stag at first began to walk with faltering steps, which gradually merged into a trot, and finally broke into a full gallop. We never saw him again.

Almost always he overestimated the weights of the stags he killed. One beast he put in at stones heavier than it really was. The head-stalker weighed it, and knowing the gentleman's weakness added about half the difference between its real and estimated weight. No sooner was the card with the weight on it sent indoors than he appeared in the larder, declared a mistake had been made, and insisted on weighing it himself. The result was little to his satisfaction, and it was difficult to determine whether he or the head-stalker bore the greater appearance of humiliation.

A little later it so happened that several stags obtained in succession on a neighbouring forest were heavier than those we got, so he at once jumped to the conclusion that the scales were not properly adjusted. He determined to find out, and that, too, in a pretty artful manner. He knew that one of the gillies often visited this lodge when opportunity afforded, and this man he instructed to get weighed on their larder

scales. This man did so, and was promptly thereafter weighed on ours. The result was that our weighing-machine registered some pounds more than did that of our neighbours, though the man declared he carried the same weight. Knowing the reason of the operation, and being of a mischievous disposition, I rather doubted the gillie's statement, but said nothing.

Another gentleman whom I served had somewhat similar propensities. By business capacity he had amassed a large fortune rather late in life. At first he had indulged his love of wild sport by renting small grouse moors. The size of these gradually increased until at last he obtained the summit of his ambition, and could talk of his "deer forest up in Scotland." Of deer-stalking and the habits of deer he had no practical knowledge, and but little use of the rifle. He was rather stout and somewhat nervous, and generally missed if he had to shoot unexpectedly or in a hurry. I always endeavoured to avoid hustle, and if possible lay beside the deer for a little before shooting. Thus he regained breath, and any nervousness wore off. Under these conditions I have seen many worse marksmen.

He, however, claimed an efficiency which results did not justify, and if he failed to hit, anything and everything was at fault but himself. In my desire to obtain stags I began by telling him the distance and instructing him to

aim high or low as the circumstances demanded. It was not very long before I discontinued this practice. If he missed, he at once attributed his failure to following my advice. Either I had wrongly estimated the distance or had told him to aim low when he should have aimed high, and *vice versa*. “Do you call that a hundred yards?” he once remarked after missing. “That stag was a hundred and fifty yards off if he was an inch.” “Well,” I answered, “it’s a pity he was not fifty yards farther away. You were clean over his back, and if he had been farther out your bullet would have been lower and you would probably have got him.” Although I did not volunteer advice, I always gave it when asked for, but I could see no reason why I should prepare trouble for myself. On the other hand, no matter how difficult a chance might be, or how “fluky” the nature of the shot, if he killed, the chance was at once declared to be a splendid one.

Among his guests were many young business men who had never seen a deer. After a successful day he would assume a patronising manner to any such who came into the larder to see our spoil. “You just come with me to-morrow, my boy, and see how I bowl them over,” was often his concluding remark. And the next day the youth accompanied him, not to stalk, but to look on. How I used to hate these days! Aware that he was being watched, and anxious to exhibit his skill,

the host became over-anxious, and the day ended with a succession of misses. I really cannot recollect a single one of these days that ended differently.

Much though I disliked these spectacular displays of marksmanship, this gentleman had another practice which I relished even worse. He rented a fairly large grouse moor in addition to the deer forest, and many of his guests were men with whom he had business connections, and who had probably never seen a live deer. As a mark of special favour he often asked these men to have a day's deer-stalking. When two rifles were out a beat was generally given to each, but on the occasion referred to this method was changed. The guest had to accompany his host. After deer had been located the latter would take me aside and consult me as to the nature of the chance and the quality of the stag. If both were good he would thus eventually address his friend :

“I haven’t had a really good chance for days, perhaps because I am not so young as I was once. Do you mind if I take this shot ? You can have another opportunity later in the day.” “Oh ! I don’t mind in the least. I shall be delighted to see you get a good beast,” was the reply. On the other hand, if the stag was a miserable beast, the host would say to his friend, “ You go and take the first shot. I’ve done a lot more of this sort of thing than you have, and will risk getting another opportunity before

night." Thus he showed his magnanimity and at the same time reserved for himself the chance of a better stag.

On all the occasions on which these wretched little beasts were killed, I had to endure the jests and laughter of the grouse staff and all who visited the larder after we got home. Being a comparatively young man then, I did not at all relish such ridicule. So keenly indeed did I feel what I considered my participation in an action I could not approve of that I soon began casting about for means of its avoidance. Eventually I hit upon a most successful plan. When I was dispatched on such stalks I always endeavoured to engage the gentleman who accompanied me in conversation, and by artfully putting questions ascertained what his previous experience of deer and rifle-shooting had been. At the same time I was carefully noting anything that indicated his temperament—whether he was nervous or not. When we got up to the stag, and just before shooting, I assumed a restless, excited attitude. This, of course, increased my companion's nervousness, and his bullet invariably flew wide of the desired mark. If the gentleman was cool and collected, I remained unperturbed, and just handed him the rifle. It was simply a case of "Here's the rifle, and there's the stag." The result was that the bullet almost always went high. Such is almost always the defect of novices—ay, and older hands as well—for my

opinion is that nine out of every ten stags missed are shot over.

Looking back on these tactics I cannot say that I feel any high degree of satisfaction in contemplating them, and yet I cannot help thinking in some respects they were justified. In the first place, it was contrary to my ideas of sportsmanship to send gentlemen who knew no better—and some of them elderly men—to shoot these poor specimens. Then I always approached as near as possible, waited for the best target, and if I volunteered no advice, I always gave the best I could if it was asked for, which it seldom was. In a word, I gave the best chance I could, for I considered it would be derogatory to my reputation as a stalker to do otherwise. I do not, however, seek to deny that my object was to obtain a miss, and I am not at all sure this was not the best result for all concerned. The man who shot was undoubtedly disappointed; but was his disappointment greater than his disillusion would have been had he killed? To the novice a very small stag in being appears a superb animal, but his magnificence vanishes with his life. What the feelings of these gentlemen would have been when they found the fine trophy they expected dwindle into horns not more than a foot long, can easily be imagined. And would they regard their host more favourably? The latter, I think, was even better pleased when they missed than hit, as he seemed to consider such a result

enhanced the value of his own marksmanship. Men with experience of stalking he never treated in this way. He knew better. Such tactics were exclusively reserved for those who had everything to learn that pertained to forest craft.

CHAPTER XII

SHOOTING DANGERS

TAKING the nature of the pursuit into consideration it says much for the care exercised that accidents in deer forests are so few. Fatal accidents are rare, and when they do occur are almost invariably due to the careless handling of firearms. An instance of this occurred a year or two ago, when a man placed a loaded rifle in a boat, holding it by the muzzle, when somehow the charge exploded and the man was shot dead. The muzzle of a gun, loaded or empty, should never be turned towards any person; many have been shot with a supposedly empty gun. In handling firearms I have always been particularly careful. Even when approaching deer on hands and knees, with a man in front, I never pointed the muzzle of the rifle in the line of progress, but turned it at an angle to the side, so that if by any means the charge went off no one would be hit. Oftener than once gentlemen who accompanied me have alluded complimentarily to such care.

Although I have frequently seen men peppered with pellets at grouse drives, I am glad

to say I have never witnessed a serious shooting accident. One, however, very nearly occurred to a stalking party whose beat adjourned mine. On the particular day for some reason two rifles were sent out with this party. One was, of course, carried by the stalker, and the other was given to a young gillie. This youth would appear to have been highly obsessed with an idea of his newly acquired promotion and importance. The lodge had not been long left when he loaded the rifle, although no deer were expected for miles ahead. Probably he thought a stag might bound across in front, when he would get in a shot before the stalker got loaded. The latter walked in front, the youth immediately behind, carrying the rifle over his shoulder by the muzzle, and apparently swinging it about. How it happened is unknown, but while ascending through a belt of wood the shot went off. The stalker had a miraculous escape. Examination showed not only the coat and vest perforated by the bullet, but the shirt as well, and even the skin over the ribs showed signs of the close proximity of the missile. A single inch more and the expanding bullet must have meant disaster.

The closest call I ever had was not from a rifle, but from a shot gun. It occurred many years ago, but I have still a vivid remembrance of the occurrence. It was a few days after the Twelfth, and we were out shooting grouse over the dogs in one of the lower corries of the forest.

One of the gentlemen was over seventy years of age, and his sight had become very bad indeed. I had the dogs to lead on the hill, and having attended on one or two previous occasions the party he was in, cannot say that he impressed me favourably. Whenever I could I kept well to the rear, for I realised that "safety first" was the proper formula when he was shooting. As a matter of fact he was a constant danger to all around him, for on rough ground he was always falling, and that, too, with a loaded and cocked gun. I dare say he had been a good sportsman in his time, but his day was past. Every night the old man returned to the lodge hardly able to drag himself along, but he was always ready to start next morning, and as keen as ever.

I remember being out with him and a colonel several years his junior, when the weather changed to mist and rain later in the afternoon. The colonel advocated going home several times, but to this his companion demurred, always exclaiming, "It's going off; it's only a passing shower; it'll soon be fine!" At last the colonel irritably called to him, "Come away home, Charlie; remember you're no longer a young man." "That's why I want to stick to it," Charlie replied, "for I won't have much longer of it now."

But to return to the incident I started to relate. The shooting party had well-nigh reached the top of a steep hill. Here the dog

pointed, and some birds were brought down. Before proceeding to pick them up the keeper signalled to me that he wanted a fresh dog. I was as usual well in the rear, and also well down the hill, but as I had now to join the shooters, hurried forward. At this season it is not unusual for an odd young bird to lie after all the other members of the covey have taken to wing, and rise some little time after. Having this in mind I approached from the rear. I must have been almost within forty yards of the old gentleman, who was the lowest of the party, when the keeper, in returning from picking up the dead grouse, flushed a "cheeper." The creature headed right through between me and the old gentleman, flying very low. The latter saw the bird, but did not notice me, probably had not even observed that I was signalled for. He raised his gun and followed round the "cheeper" until I could see the dark circles at the muzzles of the barrels. I had absolutely no cover, nor had I time to take any even if there had been. I was convinced I was in for it. To stand meant almost certain death, so in an instant I was flat on the ground, doubled up into as little space as possible, and with the fleshiest part of my body turned in the direction of the impending danger. I dare say I had not many moments to wait for the discharge, but to me the interval seemed long. I still remember my mind was occupied in conjecturing what sort of feeling the penetration of the pellets

would impart. I expected them to sting, as if red hot. At last the report sounded, and it was with a sigh of relief I heard the pellets whistle past—just over me and a little more. So certain was I of being hit that I now began wondering to what my immunity was due, and looked for an explanation. About half-way between us was a slight ridge caused by a difference in the incline of the ground. Here a smooth-faced stone, about 18 inches broad, abutted from the ground, slanting in a slightly upward direction and overgrown with moss. Rather it had been overgrown, for the charge of the shot which had not had time to spread had struck it right in the centre and stripped the vegetation clean off. The slope of the stone had deflected the course of the pellets upwards, and to this was undoubtedly due my escape from serious hurt.

On one or two occasions I have been uncomfortably near bullets, sometimes through my own fault, sometimes not. On one occasion I was sent to move a lot of hinds up to an ambushed rifle. They went straight towards it, and the sportsman began shooting, with the rifle pointed straight in my direction. A bullet hit the peat close beside me, when I at once sought the shelter of an adjacent peat-bank, and there remained until satisfied the danger was passed.

On another occasion, I and the gentleman who accompanied me were on our homeward route, which lay along the top of a long peat-

covered ridge. While proceeding down this we discovered the other party stalking a large herd of deer on the adjoining beat. The deer were mostly on the far side of an abutting mountain spur, but some were on its top, and the stalker was approaching from beyond them. Lying down, we watched operations through our telescopes. Just as the party were almost within range, some of the top deer caught sight of them. They at once dashed off, circling round him upwards and outwards, but right between us, followed by a long line of animals from below. As they actually went nearer the rifle a shot was fired. "What was that?" said my companion. "I don't know," I replied. "What was it?" "Sounded like a bullet," he rejoined, but so interested had I been in watching the stalk, I had failed to notice anything. Our doubts were soon settled, for what was unmistakably a bullet tore up the ground only a few yards from us a second or two later. Needless to say, we were soon under cover. The other party was certainly a long way off, but shooting across the hilltop there was nothing to intercept the course of the missile, and the modern weapon carries far.

An instance in which I knowingly placed myself in the way of danger occurred one day when I was out stalking to an extremely deaf gentleman. We had got right to the far end of our beat when I noticed some fine stags moving outwards and in our direction but in the neigh-

bouring beat. Our forest here narrowed to a point, with the beat boundary within 100 yards on our side. From this point, stretching at an obtuse angle to the deer, was the ground of another forest. If the stags continued their line of march, they were bound to pass into it. Anxiously I looked for the other party, but could see them nowhere. Probably they had not seen the deer, or were too far behind. Were these good beasts to get away without a shot being fired at them? Could I not head them off? Yes, I thought I could, but then I would be off my own proper beat, and where I had no right to be. The other party might also be near, though I could not see them, and if they got in first there would be a very real danger to us, as the deer would be directly between us, and they would never suspect our presence there.

Such were the thoughts which raced through my mind. The stags were only moving at a walking pace, but they had not far to go to be off our ground. Neither had I to head them. The other party might not be near; it was a pity to lose a chance; so with my eyes open to all possibilities I resolved to risk it. No time was to be lost, so we hurried forward at a good pace. Nothing occurred to impede us, and we soon found ourselves on a small flat, at the edge of which, in front of us, the ground rose a little. From this small elevation I expected to get a shot and, congratulating myself, I was proceed-

ing towards it when a bullet sang past almost at our very ears. My companion, deaf though he was, did not need to be told to lie down. The other party had got in first.

Only on one other occasion did I voluntarily and knowingly expose myself to danger. On the day in question two stalking parties were going out, a fairly large stream which ran from end to end of the forest being the division between. I had the westerly beat, the other party the easterly. We all left the lodge together and proceeded some little distance upstream to where our respective routes generally diverged. Here we halted to glass the ground, and right in front of us saw a somewhat small lot of deer with one or two fairly good stags among them. They were on the face of the hill on the eastern side of the burn and about half-way between top and bottom. The preceding night having been rough had driven them down, and they were now moving out, cropping the herbage as they went.

The route usually followed by the other party lay right over the top of the hill on which they were. If they kept on or above the line on which they were going, then that party would get shot; if they inclined downwards, then the distance from above would be too great, but a chance could be got from the bottom. To make sure of a shot and save time, it was arranged that I should go up the bottom, while the other party followed the usual route, and whichever

got within range first should shoot. This arrangement really caused me little inconvenience, for at no time would I be more than fifty yards from the burn and the ground properly allocated to me.

We accordingly separated, and I pushed on upstream at a good pace. A high, steep bank at the base of the hill afforded me abundant cover. At some places the burn came close up to the foot of the bank, at others small patches of flat, alluvial ground intervened. About a mile ahead, a small part of the bank was so shaped as to render it impossible to get farther without coming in full view of any deer that might be on the hillside above. To reach this place before the deer got beyond it was the reason of my hurry. Getting to it, and looking over the top of the bank, I was chagrined to find that the deer were already past, and only just out of range. The bank here presented rather a curious formation. A small semicircle had been excavated out of it, on either side of which narrow ridges projected in a long, even slope towards the burn. The place had exactly the shape of a horseshoe, the backward part representing the protruding ridges.

I lay and considered what to do. The deer were just a little under the line they had originally taken, and were quite a nice distance from the bottom. Once past this horseshoe formation, the bank again offered excellent cover for nearly another 300 yards. Was the covering of a

few yards to prevent my getting a shot ? It was the nearer leg of the shoe which presented the difficulty. It was about 5 to 6 yards broad and perfectly smooth, but once over it I knew the farther leg would cause me little trouble. The deer were past and would at worst only look back occasionally. If we were to lie down flat and creep forward inch by inch, stopping if the deer looked behind, I considered we should have a good chance of getting across.

I resolved to try, and got over safely. Pushing forward in expectation of getting a shot, I began wondering what the other party were doing. I knew the other stalker would never expect me to get across the obstacle I had just overcome. If he shot from the top it was by no means unlikely that the bullet might strike pretty close to us unless stopped by the body of a deer, but I had no great faith in the marksman-ship of the gentleman who accompanied him. The top of the hill was, however, fairly level ; I was farther out at the bottom than the deer, and would therefore be able to see the approach of the stalker, in which case I should remain under cover.

Such, at least, were my calculations, and in accordance therewith, I kept an eye upon the ridge as I proceeded. At last I got directly underneath the deer. No one had appeared on the top, and I was looking over the bank to see where the stags were when I noticed a calf stagger and fall, and almost at the same instant

the report of a rifle reached me. While I had been delayed, the party on the top had got forward and were in position before I began to look for them. The gentleman missed the stag he shot at, but the calf stopped the bullet, otherwise it must have arrived unpleasantly near to us.

I may be pardoned for giving in conclusion a brief account of one of the most tragic of fatalities in deer forests that has occurred within comparatively recent years. In, I think, 1864, the whole of that part of Mar Forest, which lies on the north side of the Dee from the Invercauld boundary to the border of Inverness-shire, was leased by Mr. Powel, a Welsh coalowner. The same ground was rented by the same gentleman for the successive two seasons. One day towards the end of September 1866, Mr. Powel set out to stalk in the extreme north-west of the forest. Accompanying him were George Urquhart, a native of the Beauly district, his head-stalker, and two Braemar men—John Grant, also a stalker, and a gillie with a pony.

Big stags had now begun to ramble, and Urquhart resolved to be satisfied with nothing but a really good beast. Carefully glassing the ground before him, he reached the banks of the Big Davy, one of the upper tributaries of the Dee, before he saw what he wanted. A stag was got, and Mr. Powel fired. The stag was not killed, but severely wounded, and moved off towards the county border, the distance to

which was not great. As he was losing much blood, Urquhart judged he could not go very far, and followed. The stag, however, crossed the boundary into Glenfeshie, and, getting into a deep gorge, came to a standstill, unable to go any farther.

Here his pursuers found him. Urquhart could easily have shot him where he stood, but as no pony could be got there, and he was a heavy animal, it would require much time and hard labour to haul him out of the ravine. Farther down the sides of the gorge were much easier of negotiation, and as darkness would fall before they got home, Urquhart thought it would be more expeditious to drive the animal downwards. With this intent he approached the stag, but the latter refused to move. In the expectation of getting in a shot, the stalker had carried the rifle loaded and cocked, and either forgetting or ignoring this, he hit the stag on the haunch with the butt of the rifle. Exactly what happened then is not clear. It is said that on receiving the blow, the stag hit out with his foot, striking the trigger, and hence discharging the shot. Such a statement seems doubtful, for in all my experience I have never seen a wounded stag kick with a hind leg. Moreover, though he did so, it is rather hard to conceive how the blow could fall on the trigger. Be that as it may, the shot was discharged, and the bullet penetrated Urquhart's liver and heart, causing instant death.

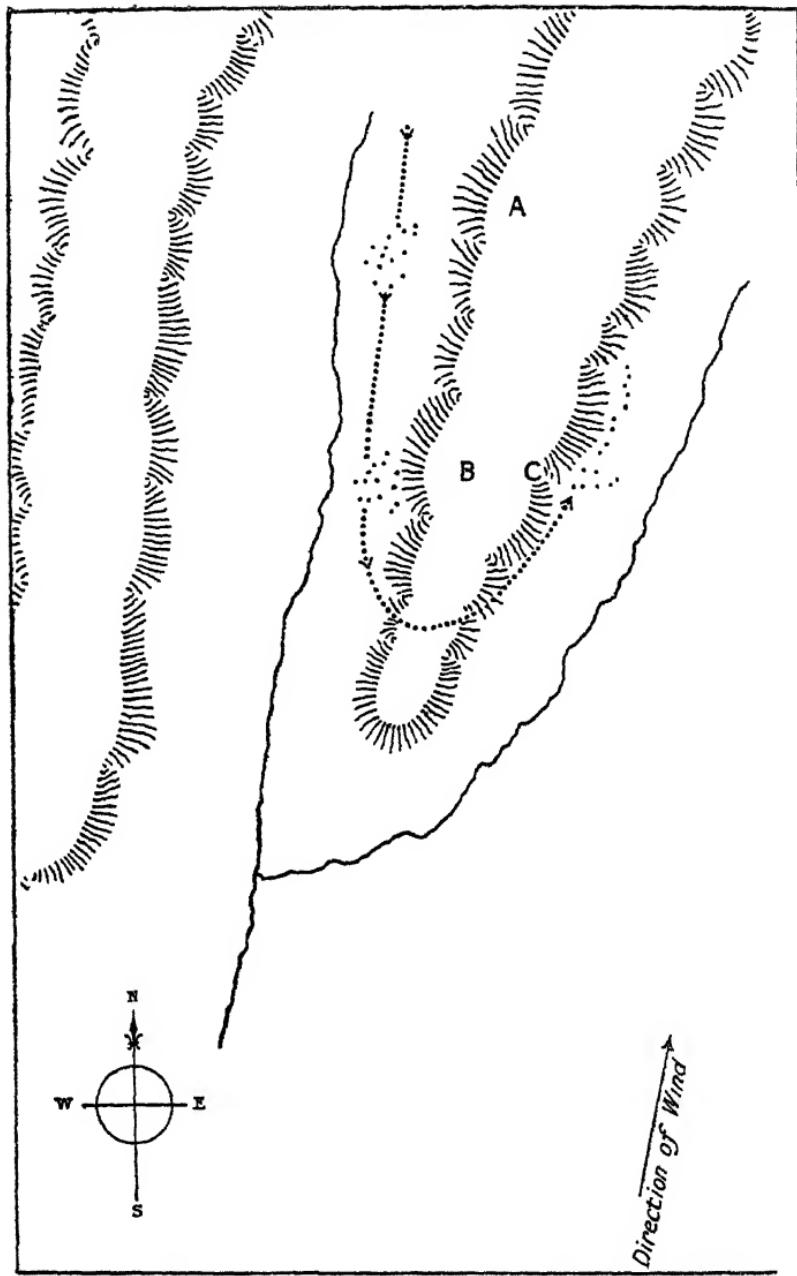
Mr. Powel and Grant carried the dead man's body with difficulty to a spot which could be reached by the pony, on whose back they intended to place it for conveyance home. Either through restiveness on the part of the pony, or for some other cause, they failed to get the remains into the deer saddle. They now attempted to carry the body home, and stumbled slowly along with it until darkness and utter exhaustion made further progress impossible. Laying their burden down on the bank of the Davy, they ultimately reached home, where they told what had occurred. Next morning a party set out from Braemar and reverently conveyed home the remains of poor Urquhart.

But a sad sequel of the tragedy followed. After what had occurred, Mr. Powel did not renew his tenancy of Mar Forest. Instead, he next year set out for Abyssinia, accompanied by his wife and son. While there, he did some big-game hunting, and when out on one of these expeditions, they were set upon by natives, and all three massacred. Nor was that all. Six months after Urquhart met his tragic fate, a posthumous child was born to him. On this child was bestowed the name of his father—George Urquhart. He spent the whole of his lifetime in Braemar, and died there as late as June 1922. Surely this must be one of the worst tragedies connected with deer-forest life in the Highlands.

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PART III

THE FOREST



SKETCH III.—TO ILLUSTRATE CH. XV. “ HUMMEL STAGS

A. First stalk. B. Second stalk.

C. Where we met deer.

Arrows = route of deer.

CHAPTER XIII

SYMPATHY AND CRUELTY

I have seen it stated on the one hand that sympathy, and on the other that cruelty, reigned in the deer forest—the one to the exclusion of the other. Such statements could only emanate from those whose observations were limited to incidents of one kind. As a matter of fact, sympathy and cruelty both exist in the forest among the deer.

As might be expected, the hind has a very considerable feeling of attachment to her offspring. About a score of years ago I witnessed a rather remarkable proof of this. One day I was viewing the ground through my telescope while high on the side of a hill that formed part of the boundary of a long and rather wide corrie. About a mile farther up the corrie from where I lay I noted a herd of deer. They were mostly hinds, with a sprinkling of calves among them—for the calving season was only about half-way to completion. As I looked I saw a hind detach herself from the herd, and move at a smart trot down the corrie. Off to suckle her calf, I concluded, but out of

curiosity I continued to follow her movements through the glass. Onwards she came without once slackening her pace, until she was immediately beneath me. Here she stopped, but no calf arose to welcome her. Bending down her head, her attention seemed to be centred on some object on the ground, but as the surface at this particular spot was much broken, I could not see what it was. For some little time she moved round and round, her head still down, and evidently still interested in some object. At last she raised her head, and gave vent to a loud, prolonged, and piercing sound. The note was about the same as the bark of alarm with which all stalkers are familiar, but of much longer continuance, and I thought partook somewhat of a woeful or melancholy nature. Having thus voiced herself, she dashed up the corrie as fast as she had descended, and never stopped till she rejoined the herd.

I had never seen a deer act in this manner before, and her behaviour was inexplicable to me. I felt the solution of the mystery was to be found in the spot where the hind stopped, and thither I hurried. On reaching the place, in a small depression, I found lying a dead calf. I could not decide whether or not it had been dead born, but certainly it had not lived long. Had the mother come back to satisfy herself that her offspring was really lifeless, or did she come back to have a last

farewell look, knowing it to be already dead ? At any rate, the sound she emitted must have been an expression of her grief.

The worst enemies of the young deer are, of course, the fox and the eagle, against which the mother is able to provide a certain amount of protection. There are, however, other dangers, which the hind can do little to prevent or remedy. A peculiar instance of this once came under my observation. I was passing along a flat piece of ground, covered with a fairly rank growth of heather. The soil was peat of a depth from three to five feet. Between the bottom of the peat and the hard subsoil, water, in the course of centuries, had worn out subterranean channels for itself. Here and there the whole of the superincumbent peat had been washed away, leaving large cavities and openings that resembled deep ditches. These subterranean stream-beds were dry except during heavy rains and the winter season. In walking over this my attention was attracted to a spot of withered heather. Withered heather is, of course, quite common, but the peculiarity of this patch lay in the fact that it formed a perfect and complete circle. Going up to the place, I found in the centre of the circle a narrow, round opening that reached down to one of the underground drains. Narrow at the top, the opening expanded, bell-shape, to a considerably greater diameter at the bottom, on which lay a red-deer calf, as if fast asleep, with

its nose turned back on its flank, but evidently dead for some considerable time.

A stern tragedy had been enacted here. The waving heather had hidden the death-trap from the unfortunate calf, which by some means had dropped in, probably hind quarters first. Reared on its hind legs, it could just manage to place its elbow-joints level with the ground. At every upward spring the narrow mouth of the hole hit its shoulders and threw it back. The mother hind could render no assistance. So round and round went the doomed creature until it had killed and blasted the heather to the utmost stretch of its hoofs in its futile efforts to secure liberty and life. Utterly exhausted, it had finally lain down and composed itself to its last sleep—for that it died asleep I am quite positive.

That calves are attached to their mothers I am certain. Every one who has done hind-shooting must have noticed how the calf stood by its fallen dam while the rest of the herd sought safety in flight, and noted the affection which overcame the fear inspired by the near approach of its greatest and most dangerous enemy.

With regard to the stags, I have often noticed somewhat remarkable manifestations of sympathy, friendship, or other kindred feeling. A stag is shot at and wounded, but for a time he is able to keep up with the herd. After running for half a mile, perhaps a good deal farther,

[H. Frank Wallace

CLU AND FOREST, LOOKING OVER LOCH LOMOND



he turns aside. In a little while it may be one stag, oftener two, and sometimes three leave the herd and join him. The wounded animal stands about for a time, and then lies down—generally in some hollow, as if seeking to avoid observation. Not so his attendant companions. They invariably select some knoll or commanding position, where they keep vigilant watch and ward, and make the stalker's near approach extremely difficult, if not impossible. Many a time have I cursed these animals for the difficulties they placed in my way by their staunch adherence to a stricken companion.

Sometimes the wounded stag is able to keep up with the herd until alarm is past, and they settle down to rest and feed. If left undisturbed, they eventually move off, cropping the herbage as they go. In the interval the wounded animal has lain down; his hurts have become stiff and sore, and he remains where he is, and often his two intimates remain with him. How long these animals remain together I do not know, but I remember wounding a stag shortly after midday, which got clear away, and it was the evening of the next day before I found him, with two others keeping vigil.

A rather peculiar circumstance is that while the wounded stag is an adult animal, those that show such solicitude for him are always young stags of, I should say, two or three years, never more than four. In the course of all my experience of forest life I cannot with certainty

say I have once seen an adult stag stand by a wounded companion. What, then, is the tie that binds these young deer to their older wounded companion? It can scarcely be blood relationship, for, as far as we know, the stag ignores, and cannot even determine, his own offspring. Still, if two deer remain by a wounded one, there is almost always an apparent difference of a year in their respective ages. I am more inclined to think that friendship must be the explanation, but then one would much more readily look for friendship between stags of approximately the same age than between the young and the old. I can hazard no opinion as to the reason for such sympathy or friendship, but I have witnessed instances of it over and over again.

Only once do I remember seeing a wounded and a sound stag in company, and then the circumstances were exceptional. I was out stalking about mid-September, when two stags appeared at no great distance, and about 200 yards over our boundary. Putting the glass on them, I saw both were good deer, but what particularly attracted my attention was the fact that one of them had evidently received a bullet well back on the lower jaw, which hung down his breast like a necktie. It was a ghastly wound—one of the worst that a stag can get away with—for, in addition to the pain caused by the bullet, the poor creature can neither eat nor drink. I am, however, convinced that such

wounds are luckily few in number, for, in the course of well-nigh forty years' stalking, I have only known two cases. In both the stags were finally shot in forests other than those in which they were hit, and neither suffered more than two days.

I resolved to devote my attention to the wounded stag. In a few minutes both were over the boundary and into one of our corries, where I at once followed them. That sound stag was, without exception, one of the wariest animals I have ever had to deal with. He was always on the alert, and kept constantly shifting his ground. Several times my approach warranted the expectation of getting within range, when, without any apparent reason, he would move off and take up a new position, followed by his wounded comrade. I had then, of course, to back out, not always an easy matter, for retreat is invariably more difficult than advance, and cover was none too abundant. These tactics continued so long that the approach of darkness was imminent.

During all this time the stags had been working up to a part of our boundary which adjoined sheep ground. At last they reached it, took the sheep fence, and disappeared in the corrie. The ground they were now on was not ours, but that caused me no concern. I knew the top of the corrie was neither deep nor wide, but if they once got down I might bid them farewell. It was my last chance, so, running as fast as I

was able, I got fairly well down a ridge that overlooked the corrie. Cautiously advancing, I saw the deer immediately underneath me, but the watchful stag spotted my head the moment it appeared over the brow. In an instant he was off. I looked round for the gentleman who accompanied me, but, being well up in years, he was a good 40 yards behind. I at once decided to shoot. It was a long shot, and the deer was moving, but it was the last and only chance of putting a suffering animal out of pain.

I put all my knowledge in the aim and fired. I had the gratification of seeing the stag give to the shot, his speed at once slackened, soon he stood, and finally lay down. Subsequently I found my bullet had got him in the haunch, but nevertheless I was greatly pleased to have put an end to what must have been intense suffering. I afterwards learned that this stag had been, the day before, wounded in one forest, and had passed into a second, out of which he was coming when I first saw him.

How these two deer came to be together I do not know, but I do not think it was because of sympathy. As a matter of fact, it was the wounded stag that seemed to stick to the sound one. Probably the latter had by some means got separated from his companions, and had been joined by the wounded one, both remaining together for the time being.

In the forest cruelty, like kindness, is often

manifested towards the wounded. Momentarily stunned by the first shock of a bullet, a wounded stag may almost immediately be able to rejoin the herd. If he draws up at the tail end, rarely is any further notice taken of him than by a shying away of the nearer deer. If, however, by a curve in flight, or any other reason, he should attempt to join the broadside of the herd, the probability is that some stag rushes out, and temporarily beats off the wounded animal by charging him in the ribs with his sharp-pointed antlers. Many times have I seen this happen.

These conditions of forest life, so far as I have observed them, may perhaps be briefly summarised thus : Between hind and calf, calf and hind, much natural affection exists. Between adult hinds selfishness reigns supreme ; it is a matter of every one for herself. Young stags often show a remarkable degree of sympathy and friendship for certain old stags, but adult stags never exhibit the same towards their more juvenile brethren. Mature stags never show marked friendliness for each other, but not infrequently treat the wounded with callousness and cruelty.

CHAPTER XIV

CALVES, WEATHER, AND GULLS

DURING the first days of its existence the red-deer calf is, perhaps, the most helpless and unprotected of the young of any species in Britain. The young of most creatures are generally protected by one or both parents, or if not they adopt certain devices likely to ensure some measure of protection ; but the red-deer calf is left for long periods entirely alone and in the open. It is usually dropped on moss-covered, broken ground, and here the hind leaves it, wandering away for perhaps more than a mile in company with others in search of food. Of course she returns at intervals to suckle her young one, and, this done, the little creature again lies down, while she hastens off to join her companions. This procedure continues until the hind is satisfied that her calf is able to keep pace with the herd when in flight from any threatened danger, when she allows it to accompany her. Sometimes I have seen what appears to be a difference of opinion between adult and juvenile as to when the latter was able to do this. The calf showed a decided inclination to follow its mother, much

against the latter's will. Having evidently expended all her powers of persuasion in vain, the mother gave the calf a sharp blow with her forefoot, and the latter, probably fearing further chastisement, immediately lay down.

The only means of protection a young calf possesses is its colouring—its coat being pretty thickly covered with white spots. To the uninitiated these spots would seem to make it more conspicuous, but only those who have had the experience can realise to what a marvellous extent the contrary effect is obtained. In its early days the red-deer calf must be one of our most graceful and handsome animals. I have known stalkers receive orders to kill them for the sake of their beautifully marked skins. Stalkers are not a squeamish class, but I doubt if one could be found among them capable of plunging a knife into the throat of the innocent and graceful creature without feeling some qualms of conscience. And what about the instigators of such deeds, who, I believe, are always "gentle" ladies? I have caught calves for pets and breeding purposes, but I am glad to say I have never once been asked to murder them. I don't think I could have done so, and I have certainly been by no means fastidious.

The worst natural enemies of the red-deer calf are the fox and eagle. In my opinion, the former is the deadlier, as he hunts by scent and sight. As the latter hunts by sight alone, a calf lying quite still stands a good chance of

escaping even the eagle's keen vision. If in motion, however, the case is different. I have seen the almost intact remains of a calf in both the fox's den and the eagle's eyrie. In the former case the fox must have seized the prey at no great distance from his lair, for it is scarcely believable that he had sufficient strength to convey it far. In the latter case the eagle must have carried it in his talons for some distance, however short. Of course in both instances the victims were meant to provide supplies for the raider's young.

I have more than once seen references in the Press to twin deer calves. I do not say it is impossible for a hind to have twins, but certainly such an occurrence must be very rare indeed. During the whole of my experience in the deer forest I have never known one case, and I am inclined to think that such statements are due to a very easily made mistake. Often have I seen the calf of one season and the calf of the preceding season suckling at one and the same time. A superficial observer would at once put down the calves as twins. The hind will allow the calf to suckle at any time, but should the year-old approach her alone with any such intent she immediately drives it off. It is only when the calf is suckling that the year-old is allowed to do so. I suppose the hind realises she cannot drive off one without driving off both, and this maternal solicitude for her latest progeny prevents her doing so. Some year-olds

seem to realise this and take full advantage of their knowledge. The habit is not a very common one, and is probably confined to the latest calves of the preceding season.

Calves seem to be peculiarly susceptible to certain impending changes of weather. Frequently, and especially during the afternoon and evening, I have seen calves participating in what I can only term play. Inevitably the weather of the following day was bad. Not once can I recall an exception. The first time I noticed this I was watching a large herd of deer. Suddenly a calf started from one end of the herd and rushed at full gallop to the other. I felt certain something had alarmed it, and expected the whole herd to bolt. To my surprise they took no notice, but treated the antics of the calf with the utmost unconcern. It is somewhat peculiar that such gambols are only participated in by a very few calves, the majority maintaining their usual demeanour. Now, why should calves be affected by a change of weather which seems to be unheeded by the older members of the herd ? Perhaps these movements are due in some way to their immature physical structure. If some organ in course of development contained air, then a change of atmospheric pressure might create an uneasiness and cause relief to be sought in action. I am not aware of any one having remarked on any connection between calves and weather, but having now called attention to it, I hope that

some of those that have the opportunity may bestow a little more observation upon this rather interesting problem.

Old deer are, however, by no means unconscious of certain impending climatic changes. During severe snowstorms, when deer are driven to low levels in search of food, the movement back to their previous haunt begins a day, or even more, before the freshet manifests itself to human observation. Some are inclined to ascribe this to the possession of an additional sense, but no doubt the explanation is to be sought in natural laws, if we only knew them. Probably some part of the animal's organism is susceptible to atmospheric change, and instinct does the rest.

The presence of certain birds strange to the locality is a sure indication of the imminence of foul weather. In a forest on which I was for a number of years, the appearance of the cock harrier was followed by wild weather within twenty-four hours. He always seemed to favour a certain ledge of rock, and not once but many times have I expelled him from this quiet haven. His appearances generally occurred in October. In this case the explanation is quite simple. The bird had been caught in the approaching storm, and had fled before it. He had moved the faster and thus appeared in the district ahead of it.

Certain birds seem to have somewhat changed their habits. On an inland forest with which

I have been long acquainted, gulls were scarcely ever to be seen. At most one or two put in an appearance only for a short time during spring. Now they can be seen almost every day from May till October. In twos and threes they skim along close to the surface of the ground, almost up to an altitude of 3000 feet. Judging from their behaviour they are evidently searching for food. Why they should now do so in a locality where they were practically unknown less than twenty years ago I cannot explain. No loch or breeding-place of gulls exists within many miles of the locality, and never once have I seen them go to roost. In vain have I puzzled to find out where they came from or where they went to.

A few seasons ago I witnessed an incident of unusual temerity on the part of a gull. It was the last year of the war, and we were very shorthanded. The whole staff on the beat consisted of myself and a pony-man who led two ponies. If I got a stag early in the day I left him lying, and tried for another, taking care to return for the pony-man in time to get off the roughest of the ground before dark. On the day in question I had killed a stag early and another later. I therefore went for the ponies, resolved to take the first killed stag to the side of the pony track, throw it off there, and then go for the second, re-saddle the first on our return, and proceed home.

When we approached the first stag we found

a black-backed gull busily engaged on the offal. He seemed to be very much incensed at our approach. Instead of betaking himself off he kept rising and settling, never more than 50 yards distant, and keeping an eye upon us all the time we were settling the stag. At last we were ready and started for home. Now I suppose the idea occurred to the bird we were taking away what he considered his own rightful and particular property. Enraged beyond measure, and certainly in more than half a mind to inflict punishment, he rose from a little knoll on which he rested, and bore down straight as an arrow on the pony-man, whom no doubt he considered the chief actor in his spoliation. With astonishment I watched his approach, and really thought he was going to strike the man in the face, for that was undoubtedly the point of attack. He did not deviate an inch from his course until he was within a yard or two of the man, who then raised his arm, and the bird passed just over his head. About 30 yards from us he settled. I had the rifle out of the cover, determined to settle accounts with him, when it occurred to me that I might unnecessarily alarm deer, so I abandoned the idea, and left him to draw what consolation he could from what we left behind.

CHAPTER XV

HUMMEL STAGS

HUMMEL stags are undoubtedly a freak of Nature. As far as I am aware, they are the same in every respect as other stags, except for their horns. Why, then, should an occasional specimen of the male sex be born hornless ? The only explanation I have seen offered is that they are a reversion of Nature back to a remote period when all stags were hornless. Are they capable of reproducing their kind ? I am inclined to think they are, though that belief is probably contrary to the opinion held by scientists.

I was once in a forest in which hummels were very rare. At intervals one would be seen, but after a short stay he disappeared again. Ultimately one of these visitors took up permanent residence on the ground. He was regarded as a curiosity and never shot at. In course of time a young hummel appeared, and as years passed the numbers increased. One or two could be tolerated, but too many of them were not wanted, so they were shot down.

This raises an interesting speculation. Can a hornless variety of stags be propagated ?

Darwin states that though horns are developed only in the males, they are certainly transmitted through the females. If it were possible to distinguish particular females and mate them with the hummels, then a hornless variety of stag would appear to be assured. This instance given of the increase of hummels, which came under my notice, does not altogether correspond with this theory. When no hummels were on the ground no young of that kind appeared, but when one took up residence they immediately thereafter increased. Still, the hinds must have had the same power of transmission of horns as before.

What seems to me a fallacy is the common belief that the branching antlers of the stag are valuable weapons of attack and defence. I have often watched pitched battles between stags, and it appeared to me that the higher points were used for pushing and fencing. The stags place their heads together and simply push. In the end the weaker gives way, and it is here that real danger arises. As he turns to fly, the victor endeavours to plunge his brow antlers into the other's body. Against such formidable-looking weapons one would think the hummel was helpless. The very reverse is the case. No horned stag has a chance with him ; in fact, even the heaviest antlered stags, instead of offering battle, will fly at his approach.

I can remember the first occasion on which I saw a hummel. I was a mere boy then, and

along with an older man was viewing a herd of deer through a telescope. Among them I discovered what I thought was a kind of peculiar appearance. I directed my companion's attention to the animal and he at once informed me that it was a hornless stag.

Gentlemen who have placed many antlered trophies to their credit are often desirous of obtaining a hummel, and will spare good antlered stags in the same herd to obtain their desire. One such attempt occurs to me. The gentleman I attended was elderly, and though he had killed many stags, a hummel was not among the number. Shortly after starting one morning, in the open days of October, I discovered a hummel lying by himself on some very rough, broken ground. Anxious to obtain a specimen, the gentleman determined to try for him.

The stalk was easy ; we walked up to within about 30 yards of where we were to shoot from, but at this distance it was necessary to take cover on hands and knees. Here my companion left his telescope and walking-stick. We got into the desired position unseen by the stag. He was comparatively close, and, though lying, offered a fairly good target. I proposed that the gentleman should take him as he lay, but he would by no means agree to the suggestion ; he preferred waiting until the animal arose. Now, the stag was not a first-class specimen, and as he lay in a nice comfortable position, sheltered from the wind and basking in the sun, it might

be hours before he arose, in which case a valuable part of our day would be wasted. "Very well," I said, "you had better take the rifle and be ready to shoot, for he may rise at any moment." I had made up my mind that he would not lie much longer. As already stated, he was not far from us, and by certain movements of my hand I managed to attract his attention. For a little he lay and looked, but unable to determine what caused the motion, he rose to obtain a better view, offering a perfect broadside. The shot rang out, and the stag fell like a stone. The report alarmed a herd of deer in a hollow near by, and as they came into view we lay still, wishing to avoid further disturbing them. I was keeping an eye on the hummel all the time, as his fall appeared to me suspiciously sudden. "You might go back for my telescope," said my companion, wishing to get a view of the newly seen deer.

I did so, but to keep out of sight had to crawl the whole way, going and returning, which necessarily occupied some time. I was within a few yards of the gentleman on my return journey, when I saw him hurriedly pick up his rifle, raise it to his shoulder, and shoot. Lifting my head, I caught a glimpse of the hind-quarters of a deer disappearing round an abutting rock. In anything but good humour he told me what had happened. Immediately after I had quitted him the hummel managed to struggle to his feet. For a time he staggered

about, and the gentleman expected to see him topple over for good. Instead he began to walk away with an uncertain step which gradually grew steadier. Realising when too late that the animal was to go, he picked up his rifle and had a snap shot at the beast just as he was disappearing. Of course he missed, and we never saw that hummel again. The first shot must have been the merest graze on the top of the withers.

One of the most remarkable stags I ever encountered was a hummel. For eight or ten years he successfully defied the efforts of his enemies, many of his escapes being truly remarkable. He seemed to bear a charmed life. It is with a smile of credulity that we regard the tales of the famous stags of tradition setting at nought the efforts of the best hunters to bring about their downfall. But there is little that is incredible about these stories. Just consider for a moment the conditions of the time. That now indispensable adjunct of stalking, the telescope, was non-existent, while firearms were slow and inaccurate. If a stag can escape from his pursuers for even half a dozen years under modern conditions, for how much longer a period would he have been likely to survive in the past?

The hummel in question was no resident of the forest on which I was. Regularly every season he appeared after the rutting season began, and, after a stay of about eight or ten

days, disappeared again. Where he came from, where he went to, we could not tell. At his first appearance he was in full maturity and easily recognised by his great size. It was the ambition of every gentleman at the lodge to obtain this animal, but fortune always favoured him, sometimes in almost miraculous manner. After years of fruitless attempts the lessee of the forest offered to bestow a sovereign on the stalker who succeeded in being the means of bringing him to the larder. No reward could, however, stimulate the efforts we were making, and the result remained as before. As illustrations of his luck I will narrate two of his escapes.

One day I and the stalker on the adjoining beat considered it advisable to deviate from our usual routes on the way out. We reached a point some little distance into the other party's beat before separating. From here we could view a large corrie or glen beneath us. Right round the opposite side of this glen was an unbroken range of precipices, hundreds of feet high. At the bottom was a fairly large wood, indented and broken by the snows of many winters, the open ground being covered with a luxuriance of grass. In one of the open spaces in the wood was a large herd of deer, and easily discernible among them was the big hummel. The other party seemed to be in luck, for if the deer remained where they were, an easy stalk and short range was anticipated. A long

detour round the head of the glen and the top of the rocks had, however, to be made before the approach was possible. The herd lay immediately at the foot of the pass. Some years before this pass had been quite practicable for men with a good head, but now it had become highly dangerous, and is now impossible of descent. About half-way down was a nasty shelving rock which had become so worn with the frosts and rains of winter that foothold was extremely precarious, and certain death the result of a fall. The stalking party therefore resolved to go on to the next pass, down it, and retrace their steps along the top of the wood until right above the deer.

Although we were wasting our time, so interested were we that we resolved to wait until we saw the stalk completed. In high hopes the stalkers sped on and were now on the far side of the glen. In the interval we occupied ourselves in watching the deer underneath. For long their motions were those common to the rutting season, but ultimately a movement of a different nature took place. Without any apparent reason whatever, the hummel, closely followed by the two other best stags, left the herd. Right for the foot of the dangerous pass the beast headed, and on reaching it began clambering upwards. Meanwhile, out of sight of the corrie, and all unconscious of what was taking place below, the stalking party continued their journey. Judging by the progress made

by deer and men, it became evident to us that both would collide at the top of the pass, provided the former could negotiate the difficult bit in the middle. With the greatest interest we watched them approach it. Reaching the spot the hummel poised himself on a ledge below and, gathering himself together, gave a great bound upwards. With a scramble he was safe. The others followed, the remainder of the way to the top being easy.

Closely followed by the gentleman, the stalker, with the rifle over his shoulder, striding swiftly along, had almost reached the top of the pass when the hummel appeared in front of them. I don't think the distance could have been much over 20 yards. The man dropped as if shot, the stalker frantically endeavouring to get the rifle out of the cover, while the hummel and his two companions, now thoroughly alarmed, dashed off as fast as their already pumped condition would allow. They had gained a good bit before a shot was fired. Flustered by the unexpected, and shooting at fast-moving deer, none of the three shots the sportsman fired found the desired billet, and the hummel soon found safety in a sanctuary to which he had headed.

Just about a year later, one morning I set out on my usual beat on the same forest. The gentleman who accompanied me was a military captain, a genuine sportsman, and as genial a companion as any one could wish. It was the

last day of his stay as guest, and as he had to leave that night by a late train, he needed to be early home. He had got a good deal of shooting and his ammunition was running low. "I have taken the whole supply of your ammunition—sixteen rounds—with me," I said before we started. "You don't expect me to shoot all that?" he queried. "Well, I hope not," I replied; "but one never knows what may happen. I have seen more used in a day."

Reaching the top of a big corrie, we could command a good view of it to where it took a bend about two miles distant. In glassing this we saw a herd only a little way down the corrie, and among them the notorious hummel. They were right in the bottom and absolutely unapproachable, but I reckoned that, as afternoon advanced, they would move on to the hill face on one or the other side, when, barring the unforeseen, a good chance would be got. I was anxious to get the stag, and consequently resolved to wait for the expected movement rather than adopt rash tactics.

The corrie in which the hummel was ran in a southerly direction, and beyond the crest of its eastern side stretched a large peaty flat. On this was another herd of deer, with one good stag among them. As we were doing nothing where we were, I began wondering whether we could not get at this herd without alarming the hummel. To do this it would be necessary to stalk between the two lots. The advantage

of this was twofold. In the first place, if we got a shot the muzzle of the rifle would be pointed away from the hummel, and thus he would be much less likely to hear the report. Again, by being between the deer and the corrie, they would run away from it, whereas, if approached from any other direction, they might dash into the corrie and carry off all it contained. I at once proceeded to carry out my intentions, and had little difficulty in getting within range. The gentleman shot and made a perfect bull's-eye. "Looks bad for the hummel," I thought. He was a good deer; I forget how many points he had, but he scaled between 16 and 17 stone. The way being clear, I got the pony and sent him straight home, telling the pony-man to return.

Getting back to the eastern crest of the corrie, we were gratified to find that the herd had moved on to the side on which we were, and were coming in our direction. Evidently they would pass straight beneath us. With the exception of a large boulder a little below us, the ground where we were was absolutely bare. By retracing our steps a little and using this boulder for cover, we eventually got to its side. Here we had a strategical position, for our range extended down to the bottom of the steep.

I was determined to take no risks, and resolved to wait until the herd fed forward. The line they were taking promised an easy chance, and already I regarded the hummel as ours.

As they approached I whispered to the captain, "They are within range now, but still coming nearer. Don't shoot until you are absolutely certain of a hit." After waiting a little longer he said, "I think I can hit him now." "Very well," I replied, "they suspect nothing; take whatever time you need and make sure." Carefully he raised the double rifle he carried, took deliberate aim and fired. The whole herd, the hummel among them, alarmed by the report, raised their heads, but stood stock-still, endeavouring to make out from which point the sound emanated. "You've missed him; try again," I whispered. Again the rifle rang out, but goodness knows where the bullet went, certainly not into the broadside of the hummel.

The deer now rushed down the corrie, keeping to the same side of the hill. "Lie still," I said, "they have not seen us and are not much alarmed. They won't go far and we may get another chance." As a matter of fact, they did not go so far as I expected, and to my disgust took up a position that commanded a full view of my only means of retreat. Had they gone another fifty yards farther, we could easily have got back over the top; as it was we were marooned. We could do nothing but watch and wait, hoping that they would soon move the short distance required to set us free. In a little time the hummel began operations which rendered this longer than we expected. In the alarm both sexes had got mixed up promis-

cuously. The near proximity of other males to the ladies of his harem did not meet with the approval of the hummel, so he began to arrange matters more in accordance with his mind. One by one he drove the hinds forward, one by one he turned back the stags. There were two heavily antlered ten-pointers in the herd who might well have been expected to take up the gage of battle, but both declined to accept the challenge and fled at his approach. I have not yet seen an antlered stag join combat with a hummel, provided they were anything like approximately the same weight. Eventually the hummel got the sexes completely separated—a task I have seldom seen accomplished in a herd of considerable numbers—and doubtless proud of his achievement, he stood on a little hillock and voiced his triumph. At this juncture a refractory hind showed decided inclinations to join the other males, and the hummel dashed off to punish her for this want of due respect to her lord and master. The move was fatal to his intentions. The stags saw their opportunity and rushed forward, thus relieving us from our imprisonment by the boulder.

Cover being available, I was not long in again being above the deer and within easy range. The hummel was moving about through the herd, and soon offered a good chance. Again the captain emptied both barrels at him, and again all that I could make out was that the animal was untouched. Some little distance

below where we lay a tributary joined the main stream at an acute angle, a long sloping mountain spur thrusting itself forward between the two corries these formed almost to the confluence. Down nearly to the point of this spur the deer ran, then swung round into the adjoining corrie. I considered it likely they would come up the opposite side of the spur, and as we were near its crest we had only about 200 yards to move to command the whole of that side. We accordingly hurried across the ridge, and had just taken up our position when the deer broke into view, coming directly towards us. By this time my confidence in my companion's marksmanship was considerably shaken, and I advised a shot before they came directly underneath us. Again he emptied both barrels without result. So excited did he now become that he completely lost his head, and despite all my admonitions to take time he pumped lead at the hummel as fast as I could load the rifle. The result of this was that the stag passed out of view entirely untouched, leaving me with one unexpended cartridge. We had discharged fourteen bullets at the hummel that day without even grazing him, and what was no less remarkable, no other beast was hit.

I now considered our day was over, and made for home. On the way I saw a few hinds with a good stag among them, and asked the captain if he cared to try for them with his single remaining cartridge. He intimated his willingness,

and I spent no time over the stalk. This time he scored a hit, but the stag did not fall dead, though very severely wounded. As the captain had now to hurry home I gave him the rifle and bade him good-bye, setting out after the wounded stag. The animal could not go fast, and I could have shot him many times over, but having no rifle I endeavoured to drive him in the direction of the lodge in hopes of getting assistance from there. In this I failed, as darkness put a stop to my operations, but we found his carcass a few days after.

The hummel survived for several more seasons, but was killed after I had left the forest. I doubt if he got strict justice in the end. He was said to have been shot on the confines of the sanctuary. I have a suspicion he met his fate when well into it. When killed he was found to want some of the teeth, and to have all the appearance of age. He only scaled seventeen stone, but I am certain that if got in his prime he must have weighed at least three stone more.

CHAPTER XVI

GROUSE IN DEER FORESTS

IN some of the deer forests of Scotland grouse are not wanted, owing to their presence increasing the difficulty of stalking. To keep down their numbers, vermin are therefore allowed to increase unmolested. On one large forest I have seen hooded crows feeding among the crofter's hens, and a litter of foxes disporting themselves in the noonday sun, not a mile distant from the village. The sportive facilities of the latter were, however, curtailed when they began raiding the hotel-keeper's poultry.

Such breeding preserves for vermin are a real grievance to neighbouring shootings, as they are continually contaminated by the overflowing surplus. In such adjoining ground, keepers are quite unable to keep vermin within desirable limits. If deer afforded the only sport, it would not so much matter, but many forests also provide a quite respectable bag of grouse. Nor does stalking suffer by retaining grouse on forest ground, provided common sense is exercised. In high-lying forests, to which these remarks apply, a goodly stock of grouse is usually to be found in the lower corries. During hot

weather in August and September, deer generally seek the higher and cooler tops, when shooting in the lower parts can be prosecuted without harm or hindrance, provided the prevailing wind is not calculated to draw the deer in that direction. Some sportsmen, however, fail to pay sufficient heed to weather effects in such conditions.

A good many years ago I was with a sportsman whom no amount of experience seemed capable of teaching. He drew out his programme for a certain period ahead, and his arrangements were as unalterable as the laws of the Medes and Persians, at least, until the mischief was done. On a certain day he would decide to shoot grouse on forest ground, and no matter how favourable conditions were for stalking, or how likely deer were to be where he was going, he would adhere to his original intention. When he saw the deer on the ground he seemed to have regrets : but always he continued shooting, after remarking, "We'll be after those devils to-morrow." And almost certainly we were, only to find there were no deer there for us. The gentleman in question rented this ground for many years and always pursued the same tactics.

Well do I remember one particularly irritating incident. We had gone to shoot grouse in one of the lower forest corries, the top of which adjoined a neighbouring deer forest. As frequently happened, the day was one on which

deer might be expected on the ground over which we were to shoot. Scarcely had we started when I noticed a small herd just up the corrie. Putting the glass on them, I could distinguish a particularly fine ten-pointer. I handed the telescope to the gentleman, and suggested that we should stop grouse-shooting, and send a man back to the lodge for a rifle. After viewing the stag, he admitted he was a good one, but said he would continue grouse-shooting, and come back for him to-morrow. Needless to say, I was far from being favourably impressed by this puerile reasoning, for who could tell where the stag might be to-morrow! As we progressed, we kept our eyes on the herd. Gathered a bit in a bunch, they would watch us for a time, race off for a bit, stand and watch again, but always getting higher up the corrie. To reassure himself, or probably me, my companion kept on remarking, "They're not much frightened; they won't go far. We're sure to find them to-morrow." Being rather disappointed, I could only reply to these remarks by shaking my head. At last they topped the corrie, the form of the ten-pointer being easily distinguished against the sky. As we watched, he sprang into the air, staggered a few paces and fell. At the same instant the sharp crack of a rifle smote our ears. The stag had been shot by the neighbouring stalking party the moment he was over the boundary. I afterwards learnt that the stalker there had seen the stag on his outward journey,

and easily surmising what had happened, had waited developments. He was certainly quite justified in doing so, but his success only accentuated our foolishness, and added bitterness to our chagrin.

I have read and heard of a good deal of apprehension regarding grouse at high altitudes. During heavy snowstorms, when all food supplies are rendered inaccessible, grouse are forced to migrate to lower quarters in search of sustenance. From this some appear to think that the bags of the ensuing season suffer, as numbers of birds never return. My experience and observation has lead me to believe the contrary. I have seen miles of ground on which not a single grouse was to be seen for many weeks during winter yield eminently good sport during the ensuing shooting season. Grouse have a strong homing instinct, and, as the snow dissolves, so do they return to their native haunts. I do not know that all the same birds that left return, but, certainly, there is no appreciable diminution in the numbers. Alien birds driven down among the inhabitants of lower stretches fraternise and probably form individual friendships. It does not seem improbable that certain of these birds that have formed intimacies may permanently remain on the lower levels to which they migrated, and that other natives of these reaches may accompany the visitors on their upward trek. Thus the beneficial effects of the change of blood should be attained by natural means. I do not

think I can recall a bad shooting season following a severe winter, unless stock was previously depleted. I do not claim that this is entirely due to the fusion of new blood as above suggested, but certainly such change would help. The purifying agency of snow must also be taken into account, as well as the fact that the pricked and weakly birds, so liable to contract and propagate disease, are always likely to succumb to the stress of weather.

In late spring, large expanses of high ground are often snow covered during the nesting period, and as grouse, of course, cannot nest under such conditions, some think that shooting there must be bad during the ensuing season. Such a contention is not necessarily the case. If grouse cannot nest in their high habitats owing to the presence of snow, they will nest on more favourable adjacent lower ground. Once their broods are able to fly, they will assuredly return to their native haunts.

I can recall an occasion on which I happened on what I consider proof of this. The lower corries of the forest I was then on afforded some good grouse-shooting, and as the Twelfth was approaching, we were going over the ground with the dogs, hoping thereby to be able to select ground likely to give us a good bag on the opening day. We had explored all our area, except a stretch at the very lowest extremity of the forest. We debated whether it was worth while hunting this part, as it was never favoured

by any large numbers of birds. Finally we decided to give it the same fare as the rest. To our great surprise we found it swarming with grouse. The dogs were scarcely ever off the point, and we could have run up a magnificent bag. Of course we went there on the Twelfth and found another surprise waiting for us. With the exception of a few isolated birds the grouse had disappeared. Now we were certain the numbers we had previously seen did not breed there. Whence came they? Where did they go? The only satisfactory answer I can find is that they had been hatched on lower ground and were migrating back to the native haunts of the parent birds. We had happened to hit on them during the course of their movement. I can think of no other feasible explanation.

The danger of late frosts addling grouse eggs at these altitudes is not infrequently a matter of undue apprehension. I am of the opinion that unless the frost is unusually severe, little or no damage is done. When the hen is depositing her eggs, she carefully covers them up with moss or other vegetation before leaving the nest. Probably this is done to render them more immune from the raids of vermin; but it is also a valuable protection from climatic vicissitudes. Once hatching begins, the bird is on the nest, and no danger ensues. With late fall of snow, the case is different. I have seen falls of such a depth as render it impossible for the bird to

locate the nest if she were absent from it throughout their duration. Wet is much more destructive than frost, and birds seem quite incapable of determining where danger from water may be apprehended. Flooding effectually destroys eggs, especially after incubation has begun, while prolonged wet or heavy rainfalls take a heavy toll of young chicks.

Many Highland keepers view light-coloured grouse eggs with great disfavour, maintaining that they are the precursors of bad health on the moors. On being asked why this was so, none could give any explanation. The matter interested me, and finally I evolved a theory which may or may not have been correct. I found that the coloration of grouse eggs was not impregnated into the shell, but were, as it were, painted on, and could easily be rubbed off. Coloration must, therefore, depend upon some separate and probably voluntary physical function, which in turn must be affected by the vitality of the bird. We are pretty safe in assuming that strong tints with vivid coloration are produced by robust, healthy birds. On the other hand, birds of low vitality may be expected to be deficient in the power of producing colorative matter, so that their eggs will be of a pale and rather sickly hue. A weakly parent often produces weakly offspring, and such are only too liable to contract disease, while their ability to fight it off is considerably reduced. Thus, in my opinion, light-coloured eggs indicate

a stock with impaired vitality. If conditions are favourable during the ensuing summer, all may be well, but if adverse, then health is likely to suffer. I have known keepers so strongly convinced of the baneful results of light-coloured eggs that they smash them in the nest. They may be right in doing so, but it is a practice I would not recommend without more knowledge of the subject.

CHAPTER XVII

HEATHER BURNING

ALTHOUGH most of my lifetime has been spent in the deer forest, I am not altogether unacquainted with matters pertaining to grouse and grouse moors, the reason being that, in many cases, moor and forest are combined in one lease. It is not for me to say whether deer-stalker or grouse-keeper has the more desirable occupation, but I would point out that where the former has only one tenant to consider, the other has two, namely, the shooting tenant and the grazing tenant. For obvious reasons, the grouse-keeper should always do his best to cultivate friendly relations with the latter. This is not always easily done, as some graziers are by no means conciliatory. On the other hand, the fault occasionally lies with the keeper, who sooner or later has generally cause to regret his lack of diplomacy. But no matter how friendly they be, there is one period of the year at which the keeper and grazier are always at variance. I have scarcely ever seen an exception. The period in question is the time during which heather is burnt.

Now, both keeper and grazier frequently

admit that the system of burning best calculated to benefit grouse is also best calculated to benefit sheep. It is when attempts are made to define this system, and put it in practical operation, that differences of opinion arise. Here, again, the keeper may be at fault, for in all classes we find men so convinced that a certain idea is right that even the clearest proof will not convince them to the contrary. Often, however, it is the grazier who is in the wrong. Impose any restrictions upon a man, and the very fact that you have done so at once becomes a grievance. Although he previously may have given no attention to the matter, he becomes filled with an intense desire to participate in the forbidden act. We can see the result of this in the foolish war measure which gave the graziers full and free liberty to burn heather as they pleased. On many stretches of previously well-burnt moors not a patch of heather was to be seen for years after. For the time being they were ruined, as far as grouse are concerned. Elated with their newly acquired powers many participated to the full in the exercise of the hitherto forbidden act, entirely ignoring the interests of the landowner. To my certain knowledge not a few have already had cause to regret their rash and inconsiderate conduct.

Owing to our uncertain climate heather burning is an operation very difficult to regulate. Although it is often done, it is useless

to stipulate that a certain proportion of the total area shall be burnt every year. This simply cannot be effected. There may be a succession of seasons in which nothing like the agreed upon area can be got consumed, and if these are followed by a dry cycle, unless the fixed proportion is exceeded the moor is likely to be overrun with heather. The necessities of the moor should alone be the determining factor.

To obtain the best results in heather burning it is necessary to take into consideration the dryness of the growth to be consumed, the nature of the soil, and the age of the heather. On some soils among aged heather an under-growth of moss, several inches thick, is frequently to be found. The crop of the heather may be quite dry, while water can be squeezed out of the undergrowth by pressure of the hand. I have frequently seen heather burnt in this condition, the result being that the heather was consumed, leaving exposed an unbroken carpet of moss. No operations under such conditions should be allowed. Before a growth of any kind can assert itself the moss must cease to exist, and the process of its decay occupies years. Thus the succeeding growth of heather is delayed for a corresponding length of time. Moreover, it is a very real danger, for should a future fire set it alight, no available power is capable of extinguishing it, and the consequent result may be the clearance of many acres,

Observation has convinced me that burning after a prolonged dry period is not nearly so beneficial as many suppose. No doubt every vestige of vegetation is consumed, but that is not all. Where the soil is thin and dry the heat penetrates sufficiently far to kill the roots of the heather. Thus the ensuing growth must result from the seed alone, and therefore takes a considerable period to establish itself. In my opinion the best results are obtained when the fire is just able to consume the vegetation without penetrating into the soil. Under such conditions I have seen areas burnt at the end of March show a growth of young heather an inch long by mid-October. On digging down I found the young shoots springing from the roots of the consumed heather, the vitality of which had remained unimpaired by the passing conflagration. Of course I am aware that all heather cannot be burned under ideal conditions, but it is well to know what these are.

It is pretty generally conceded that aged heather takes longer to reassert itself after burning than does younger growths. This is probably due to the universal law of natural decay affecting the whole plant. Nevertheless I am of the opinion that the nature of the soil has more to do with the succeeding growth than the age of the heather consumed. I do not know of any soil on which heather takes longer to reach maturity than a stiff texture of mortar of a considerable depth. On such

ground it grows exceedingly slowly, and after burning, grass usually takes its place for years.

The quickest growth of heather is on thin, peaty soils, with an admixture of sand. Here the ling attains to no great length or thickness, but the growth is close and succulent. Needless to say the heather on light soils such as this requires to be burnt much more frequently than that on heavy soils. Curiously enough, heather in which the stems attain to the greatest thickness is never of any very great length. The longest heather I have ever seen measured 4 feet 10 inches, and was comparatively slender, but the stems were of practically the same thickness from root to crop.

On several occasions I have seen heather practically permanently ousted by other growths. On mortar soil I have seen a close growth of grass without the appearance of a single plant of heather ten years after burning. Whether or not the heather would again supersede the grass I do not know, but it would assuredly have had rather a hard struggle to do so. On lighter soil, at higher altitudes, I have seen its place usurped by a close and vigorous growth of bilberries or blaeberrries. On several moors that plant is undoubtedly increasing, and I know places which only a few years ago were entirely heath-clad, and which are now unbroken expanses of bilberries. Why these changes should occur I cannot tell; to me they seem due to some unexplained law of Nature. In some

places cycles of vegetation seem to have occurred. I have seen what was once a perfect growth of heather about 2 feet below the surface in a deposit of peat. It bore no trace of fire, and must have died from natural causes. It must have been succeeded by a growth of grass and moss, the decayed remains of which had accumulated above it. This must have occupied a very considerable period of time. All the same, heather had again reasserted itself, and a luxuriant crop waved above the remains of its last but long defunct predecessor.

As I have already pointed out, no hard-and-fast rule can be laid down for ensuring the best results for heather burning. It ought to be regulated by the conditions existing on the individual moor, such as the nature of the soil, the age and area of heather, and other details perhaps apparently trifling, but not necessarily unimportant. Runaway fires are an ever-present danger in dry seasons, and the wise keeper should certainly do all he can to obviate any such danger. Sometimes the unexpected happens, and no blame can be attached to any one, but unfortunately there are keepers, as well as others, quite incapable of considering conditions as a whole.

A common cause of runaway fires is a shifty wind. A man kindles a fire under the impression that the wind will carry it straight to a certain point. His attention to the air-current is limited to the time at which he sets the

heather alight, whereas had he been previously observant he would not have failed to notice that the breeze was anything but steady. Soon the wind changes and blows in spells, first from one side and then the other. Of course, little can be done in the teeth of the wind, and the fire spreads with alarming rapidity, the result being that perhaps many acres are involved. Now, any keeper who is even tolerably observant ought to know that the wind is often changeable during the earlier part of the day, and that by mid-afternoon it generally blows steadily from a certain point. Hence where there is a danger of a fire getting out of control it should not be ignited until the wind blows steadily from a settled direction. If this fact was more generally acted upon it would be more to the benefit of all concerned.

In dry periods I have seen the heather burnt backwards against the wind. The results of this method are good enough, but it is frightfully slow, and not at all calculated to keep pace with the necessities of a moor.

An inadequate staff is also occasionally the cause of a fire getting out of hand. There should never be less than two men on each side of a fire during dry periods. If the weather is very dry, and large stretches of heather have to be dealt with, two are not enough. Even the assistance of a boy at the critical moment may obviate great damage. Well do I remember an unfortunate experience I had once. The grouse-

keeper kindled a fire, and he and I took a side each. A certain distance ahead of me was a bare patch, at the end of which I was supposed to extinguish the side I was on ; after which I was to go to the assistance of my companion. I said I feared the wind would bear more in my direction, but the keeper assured me that I should have no difficulty in putting out the fire at the end of the bare bit. What I feared happened, and to gain the desired end I wrought until I was completely exhausted. The result was that I missed the bare patch by about a yard, and nearly 200 acres of moor were rendered a blackened waste.

CHAPTER XVIII

ACCIDENTS OF THE FOREST

SOME years ago I witnessed an occurrence among grouse of a kind that I think must be rare indeed. It was late September, grouse were wild and collected into huge packs, many of which were on high elevation on forest ground. We were out after deer, and the day was very stormy, a strong northerly wind blowing. Where we were two small ridges ran parallel to each other, with a burn between. Both ridges terminated abruptly, and were joined at the top by ground of practically the same elevation. We were advancing up one of these ridges when we alarmed a lot of grouse that had been resting in the shelter at the top of the little corrie. Rising they swept down the side of the opposite ridge, skimming close to the ground, but at a terrific pace, as the strong gale was behind them. Just then a gillie, who was following, came in sight of the sheltered ground at the far end of the ridge. Another pack which was resting there saw him, and rose perpendicularly through the still air, until they got into the gale. Owing to the low flight of the first pack and the abrupt termination of

the ridge, neither lot of birds were aware of the presence of the other. At the moment the second pack rose above the ground-level the first was into them. Grouse can deviate from their course very quickly, and, on this occasion, most of them successfully did so, but two pairs collided. One pair carried on, apparently somewhat injured, but the other pair dropped.

As we were in no particular hurry, and as the incident interested us, we crossed to the opposite side to see if we could pick up the fallen birds. On the way we met the gillie, who, we ascertained, had seen nothing of what had occurred, and who, it was easy to see, regarded our statement with a good deal of scepticism. "If you know near about where they fell we should have no difficulty in finding them, for there is not cover here to hide a grouse," he said. That we realised, for the only vegetation was grass and moss, short and unbroken. Forward we went, and had no trouble in picking up both birds. They were stone dead, and lay about thirty yards apart. Evidently they had struck each other fair and square. I have heard the wings of rising grouse frequently collide when a covey has been flushed, and I have seen endless numbers killed on wires, but the above is the only occasion on which I have seen birds kill each other in fair flight in the open.

Some years before, I came across a deer to

[H. Frank Wallace

SGUR-NA-C'ICHE AND CORRIE-NA-GALL, GLEN KINGIE

One of the grandest corries in Scotland



which a very peculiar accident had befallen. One evening we were returning from a day's stalking down a corrie that branched off from the main glen near the lower confines of the forest. Just where the burn which we had descended joined the main stream, I noticed a knobber, which we had evidently alarmed, making his way up the side of the latter at a very moderate pace. The fact that he was alone, and so far down, seemed proof that there was something wrong with the animal, but deeming that he had probably received a stray bullet, I gave the matter no more thought. Next evening we came home by way of the main glen, and about a mile above where we struck it the previous night, came upon a dead knobber. I had no doubt it was the same beast we had seen the evening before. I turned aside to see what had been the cause of death. I found the carcass to be quite warm; evidently he was newly dead. He was terribly emaciated. The closest scrutiny showed me no signs of any kind of wound, and I was on the point of leaving him when I thought I noticed a small swelling well back on the jaws. On opening his mouth, I saw a piece of bone inside, and inserted my fingers to pull it out. This I found was not to be easily done, so, taking my knife, I slit back the cheek and thus removed it.

It is well known that deer, and especially young deer and hinds, are much addicted to chewing shed horns, but they chew bones as

well, though not to the same extent. This knobber had evidently picked up a piece of bone, the ends of which had been previously chewed into sharp and jagged points, or he might have chewed it into that condition himself. Getting it well back into his mouth he had by some means turned it right across his jaw, and, the sharp ends coming in contact with the cheeks, had caught in the soft flesh. It was too far back for him to get his tongue behind it, neither could he use his teeth with any effect. All his struggles to remove it only served to fix it firmer and deeper, and as the poor animal could not feed, he finally died of starvation.

On another occasion when I was out after deer, something startled the herd, and they dashed up a very steep pass and disappeared over the top. Our route took us in view of the ground the deer had traversed when they were out of our sight. There my eye caught an object which I did not recollect as having been there before, and, putting the telescope on it, I found it to be a dead stag. On going up to it we found it quite warm, and it bled freely. We took it home, and, on being skinned, we found no bullet hole or mark of any kind of injury could be seen. That the stag dropped out of the herd we saw, and died of natural causes—probably heart failure, or the bursting of a blood-vessel, brought about by the race up the steep hill—I have no doubt. Still, such occurrences are far from common, and that was the only

instance of the kind that ever came under my personal observation.

The golden eagle is one of our protected birds, and, rightly so, I think, for I should not like to see him exterminated, although some of his habits are of a rather undesirable kind. One often sees the adjective "noble" prefixed to his name, and I wonder if it is altogether appropriate. True, no doubt, he kills a large proportion of the creatures on which he feeds, but he will also gorge himself with the rankest carrion. There is not very much nobility in that, I think.

In a forest on which I once was, stood a rocky face much frequented by ptarmigan. Many of these birds fell victim to the eagle, and a certain projecting point of rock, covered with grass, was always strewn with their feathers. Nowhere else on the same face did I ever see a trace of his spoil. Evidently he carried his prey to this particular spot to devour—why, I cannot tell.

When an eagle catches a hare he strips the skin off as intact and neatly as though it were done by human hand. The first occasion on which I saw this puzzled me not a little. I was one day out during mid-winter, when, at an elevation of over 3000 feet, I came upon the skin of a hare in much the same condition as though it had been taken off for cooking. No bones or refuse of any kind lay near it. At first I thought the skin had been taken off by

a human being, but why any person should have been at that place at that time I could not tell. An old stalker afforded the explanation, and I have seen many similar traces since.

Although by a long way our most powerful bird, the eagle is by no means a match for some much smaller combatants. Once I saw an eagle soaring placidly along when, from a range of precipices immediately below him, a falcon shot up into the air. Without a moment's hesitation he attacked the giant bird. The eagle at once joined combat, and through the telescope I could see his efforts to hit his adversary with beak and wing. One blow from either and it would all be over with the falcon ; but the latter evidently realised this, and regulated his tactics accordingly. The movements of the eagle were slow and cumbersome compared with the rapid action and lithe activity of his adversary. Every time he dodged the eagle's stroke, and, wheeling rapidly, got in his blow before the huge bird could recover himself. That the eagle was in a great rage was evident, for I could hear him omitting sounds that resembled nothing so much as the bark of a terrier. Finally, realising the hopelessness of the contest, he took to flight. I previously knew that the eagle was fast on the wing, but the speed he now exhibited was a revelation to me. With half-extended, half-curved wings, showing never a tremor, he cleft the air straight as a bullet. The falcon pursued, but being left hopelessly behind, soon gave up the chase.

One day when lying high up on a hillside, I saw an eagle swooping down the corrie. A little before he came level with me, a single grouse rose almost directly beneath him. In an instant he was after it, and soon had it in his talons. I expected to see him come to earth to enjoy his meal, but, to my astonishment, after holding the bird for a little, he released it. Apparently little injured, the grouse flew across the corrie and pitched in a small patch of heather. Knowing to a yard where it alighted, and filled with curiosity to know more about the grouse, I crossed to where it was. Cautiously approaching, I saw it hiding among the heather, and caught it with my hand. Grouse disease was prevalent that year, and this bird proved to be in the last stages of the malady. It was practically nothing but bone and feather, and could not have lived many days longer. Did the eagle realise that no meal was to be obtained off his capture, and was this the reason that made him release the bird?

On another occasion while spying for deer I noticed an eagle over a narrow corrie some distance ahead. He dropped something from his talons and soon dived after it. "Lost hold of his prey," I thought. The intervening hill prevented a full view, but in a little the eagle reappeared with the object he had dropped again in his talons. Regaining his previous altitude he again dropped the object and again dived. This proved that whatever he was doing his actions were intentional, and, curious to know what was

happening, I turned the telescope in his direction. In a little he rose again, and as he was not a mile distant, I could make out the object he held was a bird. Again he released the hold and the bird fell. I was astonished to see that the bird was alive, and much more so when I made out beyond dispute that it was one of his own young ones. Once free of the parental hold, the little creature spread out its wings in an effort to fly, but the endeavour was ineffectual, and only served to retard its descent.

Unfortunately, I could not see him catch it again, as the hill intervened, but that he did so without inflicting the least injury was apparent. For some little time this proceeding went on, but finally the eagle flew off with his burden. I have never seen a similar instance before or since, and have frequently wondered what the cause of it could have been. It really looked as if the eagle were teaching its young one to fly; but then instinct teaches all young birds to fly just the same as it teaches the youngest spider to spin its web as well as the oldest one. Among the wild creatures, instinct is the universal school-master. How, then, account for the peculiar behaviour of the eagle in this instance?

It is an established fact that eagles occasionally "cliff" deer, especially young deer. That is, they kill them by driving them over the cliffs for the sake of getting a meal off the mangled remains at the bottom. I am inclined to think they must be very hungry before they

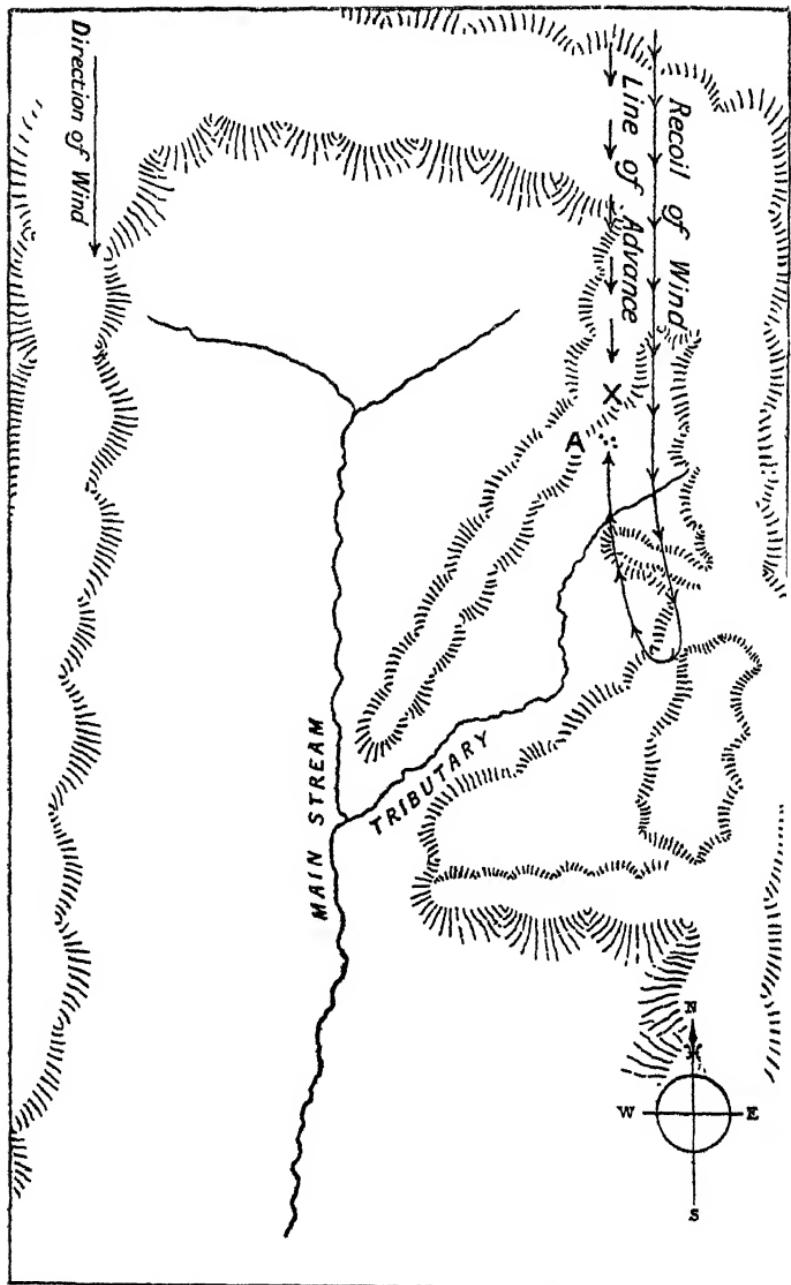
resort to this method of obtaining food. Instances of this are rare, and have never been witnessed by me, though I have no doubt that I once saw the initial stages of one such tragedy.

While out one day I noticed two roe-deer grazing peacefully in a corrie towards the lower extremity of the deer forest. Then I saw an eagle appear, and, stooping, he dashed past quite close to them. The startled animals bolted away for some distance and stood evidently regarding the bird with amazement. But they were by no means done with him. Again he descended, and this time the roe-deer headed down the corrie. This course evidently did not fit in with the eagle's plans, for he met them in the face, and struck at them with his wing, but whether he hit them or not I could not make out. For a time these tactics went on until the roe-deer seemed to become utterly stupefied. The eagle now began driving them up the corrie in much the same way as a shepherd drives sheep, and the poor animals seemed incapable of resistance.

It then dawned on me what the giant bird's intentions were. The corrie in which the roe-deer were was covered with grass and heather, but on the other side of the hill was a precipice hundreds of feet high. It was straight towards this that the eagle was heading the roe-deer. By and by the top was reached, and the actors of this strange drama passed out of my view. What was the end I cannot tell,

as circumstances prevented me following, but I have little doubt that one or both of the roe-deer met a cruel fate by being driven over the precipice. The top of the hill was our boundary, and the rocks were therefore not on our ground, else I would certainly have satisfied myself as to whether or not the remains of the roe-deer lay at the bottom of the cliffs.

P A R T I V
STALKING DAYS



SKETCH IV.—TO ILLUSTRATE CH. XXII. “WIND AND LIGHT

- A. Where deer lay in shelter.
- X. Where we shot from.

CHAPTER XIX

DAYS WITH DEERHOUNDS

THE use of dogs in deer-stalking has now almost, if not altogether, been abandoned. One reason for this is the accuracy of the modern rifle, which is supposed to require no adjunct, but all the same stags are missed, and wounded animals escape, which a dog would secure. The major reason for the discontinuance of the use of dogs is, however, the disturbance they cause. The chase may be long or short, according to the nature of the wound inflicted on the pursued animal, but every deer flies terrified from the course. Again, when the stag is brought to bay, every dog gives tongue, and as far as the sound carries the ground is cleared. The abandonment of dogs is therefore largely a matter of utility, but I cannot help thinking that stalking has become less picturesque through their disappearance.

In the earlier years of my stalking experience, even the smallest forest could boast one deerhound, while whole kennels were kept on the largest. Fine handsome dogs they were,

too, and their value may be gauged by the fact that the purity of the breed has been maintained for ages. Their origin is lost in the mists of antiquity, largely owing to a confusion of names. They are, however, the Culia, or grey dog of the ancient Highlanders, which figures in Fingalian legend, and is believed to be represented on the sculptured stones of Meigle, in Perthshire. These stones are considered to be pre-Christian, and to date as early at least as the ninth century. Scrope pays them high tribute, which few who know them intimately will, I think, regard as altogether undeserved.

Among the first deerhounds with which I had intimate association was a yellow dog named Oscar. The reason for my outstanding recollection of this dog is probably due to the fact that he played his part in a stalking incident which occurred in the late '80's, and which I can recall as vividly as though it had happened yesterday. The forest I was then on was not large, affording scope for only one rifle until the end of the season, when a second was employed. I was engaged as a gillie by the shooting tenant, but had to stalk for the second rifle. Just before it was decided to have this addition, my employer gave me a very flattering account of the gentleman I would have to accompany. Much of the eulogium I have forgotten, but I can remember being told his family had come over with the

Conqueror, he had rented one of the largest forests in the North of Scotland, was exceedingly fleet of foot, and a deadly marksman. Personal experience of this gentleman led me to form somewhat different conclusions. I stalked to him for a fortnight, and our bag totalled two stags, neither of which we would have got if it had not been for the deerhound. Moreover, he was haughty, irritable, found very little as he considered it should be, and succeeded in making himself anything but popular with the hill staff.

After I had stalked to him for about a week and got to know his characteristics, one day he and I went out alone ; all the other members of the staff, including the men who led the dog and the pony, being with the lessee on the other part of the forest. Early in the day we came upon a large herd of deer, among them being several good stags. They were well up the side of the hill, at the top of which was our boundary, here exactly defined by the remains of an old sheep fence, towards which they were feeding. As I suspected they would soon be off our ground I went after them at once. The rifle we had was a double-barrelled .450, the hammers of which were kept at "safe" by bolts on either side. When we had almost reached the spot from which we were to shoot, I drew the rifle out of the cover, and proceeded to slip back the bolts, thus leaving the hammers free at half-cock. While doing so, my com-

panion, evidently mistaking my actions, said, "Don't cock the rifle." I replied, "No," and proceeded to slip back the bolt. Thinking I was disobeying him, he repeated, "Don't cock the rifle," very sharply. I assured him I had not done so.

Reaching the top of the hillock I found the deer within easy range. A good stag stood broadside, and handing the gentleman the rifle I told him to shoot. I noted that the stag saw us, but reckoned he would look at us as long as we required, for he was quite uncertain what we were. I kept my eye on him to see the result, and was wondering why no shot was being fired, when a muttered exclamation from my companion directed my attention to him. He had forgotten to cock the rifle. Of course he had to take it down from his shoulder to do so. The stag noticed the movement, and bolted off towards the boundary, followed by the whole herd, and our chance was lost. I hurried after them, but conditions were now much more difficult, and by the time I got within range of the tail-end of the herd all had crossed the boundary but a few useless beasts. A good stag, however, stood almost touching the farther side of one of the posts of the old fence. He was not 6 inches over our boundary, and I saw no harm in shooting, which I told my companion to do. But he knew the old fence formed the march, and noted the post on the near side of the stag's neck. "I won't shoot at a beast over the

boundary," he scornfully replied, so I arose, put the rifle in the cover, and walked off.

Our boundary at first ran northwards for some miles, then turned abruptly eastwards for no great distance, when it again turned in a southerly direction. These outskirts formed my field of operations for the day. In the early afternoon I discovered a considerable herd lying close to the boundary, just a little beyond where it turned southwards. These I stalked and got within easy range. Nothing untoward occurred, and the gentleman gave the stag I indicated both barrels without result. Of course, they were over the boundary at once, and by the time I got re-loaded they were well-nigh 150 yards away into the neighbouring forest. As the march was anything but clearly defined here, and as my companion showed an inclination to shoot—remembering also, as I did, the incident of the earlier part of the day—I remarked, "They're well over the boundary now." "I don't care a damn where they are," he irritably replied, and discharged both barrels at some animal or animals of his own selection.

In the circumstances I was none too pleased to see quite a good stag severely wounded. In fact, so hard was he hit, that he was unable to follow the herd in their northward flight. Instead, he turned westwards, where going was easier, and ultimately lay down among some broken, peaty ground about 200 yards off our northern boundary. Immediately I wished I

had had the dog, and instinctively I took out my telescope and turned it in the direction in which I expected the other party to be. I soon found them, and what was more, I noticed that the man with the dog had left them and was coming in my direction. The head-stalker had seen what had happened, and deeming that I had probably more use for the hound than he had, had despatched him to join me. I sat down to await the arrival of man and dog, and at the same time keeping an eye on the wounded animal, and considering what my further procedure would be. A survey of the ground where the stag lay convinced me that I could get within 40 yards of him, and if I had to shoot could have taken long odds that he would never rise again. I, however, knew that the gentleman would never dream of giving me the rifle, and judging from previous experience, I was anything but convinced that he would score a hit. But if he missed, what then ? Although off our ground, I felt that a single shot would cause no disturbance to the neighbouring stalking party. I felt much less confident what would happen if the dog was slipped. The stag lay pretty high on the side of a corrie that stretched to the westward. For a considerable distance its bottom was comparatively flat, but where it terminated, its waters descended a mere burn down a steep hill-face to join the larger stream which drained the main valley. No deer were in the corrie in question, and if the

stag were at once hard pressed I considered it likely that he would be brought to bay within limits. On the other hand, if he got to the steep descent he would certainly reach the larger stream probably at a point miles distant. Finally, I resolved to stalk the stag, and act as circumstances seemed to necessitate.

I had no difficulty in following the route of approach I had mapped out. To reach the peat-bank nearest to the stag we had to crawl on hands and knees for some little distance. Here I had to leave the man with the dog. Before doing so I told him to loose the hound's collar, keeping both ends in his hands, and be ready to let him go the moment I wanted him to do so. Reaching the peat-bank I very carefully peered round its side, and was gratified to see the stag offering almost as good a broadside as if he had been standing. "Sure," I thought, "he cannot miss this?" In whispers I gave him to understand the position of affairs, and impressed upon him the desirability of killing the animal where he was. In reply, he assured me he would take the greatest care to ensure a hit. After the crawl we had, our hands were, of course, peaty, and to ensure success as far as possible, I gave him my handkerchief to wipe the matter off his hands. When he declared himself ready, I pushed the rifle over the bank; he slowly raised himself, slowly elevated the rifle to his shoulder, took steady aim, and fired. Goodness knows where the bullet hit, but it must have en-

countered something hard, for it went away whistling, and all round the stag was nothing but peat. The animal sprang to his feet and bolted, the second barrel proving as ineffectual as the first.

I called to the man behind to let go the dog. I now found that for some unaccountable reason, he had not loosened the collar as I had directed. Further, instead of now doing so, the man, evidently confused, began to run towards me. Thus some valuable time was lost before the dog was slipped. Instead of taking a downward course into the corrie below, the stag headed straight along the hillside in the direction of the main valley. He had got a considerable start, and to my dismay the hound, instead of following directly after him, took a lower course, which tended to keep him farther out of the corrie below. That I was exasperated is to put it mildly. All by a series of blunders on the part of the gentleman, the gillie, and the dog.

I felt confident the race would now be a long one, and that the stag would only be brought to bay at some point in the main stream—but where? Seizing the rifle, I rushed off as hard as I could run. I had not got far ere pursuers and pursued vanished over the brow that obscured the steep descent and led down into the main valley. When I gained this point, the bay of the hound greeted my ears, and I saw the stag at bay in the main stream a long distance ahead. On reaching the foot of the steep, I found that about

50 yards of perfectly flat alluvial ground lay between me and the two animals. I had covered no more than half this when the dog happened to notice me. He had become very much attached to me, and no sooner did he notice my approach than he left the stag and came to meet me. I did all I could to get him to return. It was useless ; the dog would not leave me.

This was another misfortune. I knew that, left to himself, and aware of my approach, the stag would not long remain where he was. A large and dense wood approached close to the other side of the stream, and, if he got into this, I had little hopes of ultimately securing him. Hitherto, I had never looked behind; now I did so, as I intended giving the gentleman the rifle to shoot, but was mortified to find that this reputedly fast person was a long, long way behind. I knew he had the strongest possible objections to his stalker shooting at a stag, and the alternative that now faced me consisted of an immediate decision either to incur his probable resentment by shooting or let the stag escape. I resolved to shoot. I knew the stag would not allow a near approach, but I moved a little closer with the intention of risking a long shot. He stood in the stream almost broadside watching me. I dropped on one knee, but so pumped was I that the sight danced everywhere. A steady aim was impossible, so, waiting until I thought the sight was passing the proper place, I pulled. At the very instant I did so, the stag

turned, and I had the mortification to see the bullet strike the water level with his side.

With a spring he was out of the water, but instead of making for the wood, as I expected, he headed down the flat by the burnside. I ran after him, urging on the dog. 'Twas vain! The brute refused to leave me. My only chance was the other barrel. It was a long shot, the stag was end on, and in my breathless state the odds were about a hundred to one against my getting a hit. Dropping on my knee, I took the best aim I could at the light-coloured part of his stern, and pulled. To my great surprise he dropped like a stone. When "gralloching" him, I looked for the bullet hole, but failed to see it. It was only when taking the skin off I found it in the back of the skull. My aim had just been a little high, for tail and head were in a direct line.

When the gentleman came up, instead of getting the censure I expected, I found he had nothing but praise. I now looked back for the man who led the dog, as I expected he would follow, but he was nowhere to be seen. I was wondering where he had gone, and considering how I was to get the stag removed, when our pony appeared over the brow. Instead of following, the man had gone back and sent the pony after us, being evidently satisfied that we would secure the stag. On our way home we had to pass the neighbouring shooting lodge, and here the gentleman called, but, finding no one, left a

letter of explanation and apology. I afterwards found that our chase, which covered miles, did not in the least interfere with the sport of our neighbours.

I have had several other courses with deer-hounds, but the foregoing is certainly the most outstanding. Poor Oscar! He was ultimately found dead in his kennel one morning, having succumbed to heart failure—a malady that has terminated the career of more than one of his breed.

CHAPTER XX

TERRIERS AS TRACKERS

WHEN deerhounds passed out of favour, as far at least as I was concerned, their place as "trackers of the deer" were taken by terriers—surely a great down-come from the stately "dogs which Fingal bred." Nevertheless, I found these little animals very useful. Most of those with which I had to do were anything but pure bred, and would never have received any attention at a dog show. The majority had a long strain of the wiry-haired Scotch in them, but others—and these of the best—were quite nondescript.

The change, like most other changes, had its advantages and its disadvantages. Very little cover hid a terrier. In such emergencies as deer approaching closely and unexpectedly, little difficulty was experienced in getting them out of sight, whereas the large, high-standing hound was often difficult to hide. If desired, they could also be taken up closer to the spot from where the shot was taken. With most of them, however, there was a danger in doing so. After a little experience, they got very knowing, and

quite realised what was happening. As a result, they got excited and began whimpering and barking. Thus, unless with an exceptional few, I always thought it prudent to leave them where they could not see the rifle. As they ran by scent, it did not matter much whether they were immediately slipped or not, for they would pick up the trail as long as it was hot, and many of them stuck to it in a wonderful manner. Being much slower than the deerhound, unless the animal was severely wounded, they often gave a much longer chase, and in broken ground it was often difficult to know the exact route they had taken. In fact, there have been occasions in which I have lost all knowledge of their whereabouts. Like the hound, they gave tongue when they brought their quarry to bay, and it was by this that I generally found them when they had otherwise passed out of my ken. I suppose part of the reason why they superseded the hound was the expectation that they would create less disturbance. Certainly their bark was less loud than the deep bay of the hound, but it was shriller, and carried a long distance when conditions were favourable. If consideration is also given to the longer distance they had to pursue their quarry, it is doubtful if much was gained as regards disturbance.

Quite the best of these little dogs with which I was intimately associated defied any attempt at classification. He was wire-haired, his markings being liver and white. A long body sur-

mounted short legs. His head was long, ears hanging, and his tail resembled that of a fox-hound. Unlike most, he never whimpered before the shot was taken, so I generally took him forward with me. He seemed to realise the difficulty of approach where cover was scanty, for I have seen him pull himself forward on his belly by my side. When we reached our objective, he never appeared anxious to see what was in front ; nevertheless, I always took the precaution to keep hold of a leash or piece of twine attached to his collar. I cannot remember his ever having failed to run down any animal whose trace he took up. On one occasion a large herd of deer crossed the route of a stag he was following. I fully expected he would lose the scent, and he certainly was delayed for a little, but he soon picked it up again. The ugly little dog belonged to the head-keeper, who refused several good offers for him. At last he fell, unable to resist the tempting offer of £20 offered by a stalking gentleman who had seen him at work. The price was little short of fabulous, as the appearance of the dog certainly did not warrant the outlay of more than an equal number of shillings.

I had several good runs with this terrier, but all were of the routine kind, so I will only make special reference to one, not on account of anything the dog did, but for its rather unusual termination. The afternoon was pretty well spent when I succeeded in getting a stalk.

Although the chance was fairly good, the sportsman's aim was erratic, and instead of hitting the stag he aimed at, he got into a small beast with horns about a foot long, and destitute of any attempt at a point. I knew our last chance for the day had gone. The wounded animal had broken away from the herd and turned downwards in the direction of home, and as I did not wish him to die a lingering, painful death, I resolved to slip the terrier. I fully expected the chase to be a long one, but knew there was no deer to disturb on the route likely to be taken.

Pursuer and pursued had not gone far when they were lost to view. I hurried after them as fast as I was able, but, despite my utmost efforts, I could see or hear nothing of them. There were a number of corries which the stag could enter, by simply keeping to the same level. These I examined as I passed, but without result. These corries were on the left of the main valley; its right was comparatively open, and I kept an eye on it as I approached. When I finally gave up the search, I had almost reached the lodge, and, as I approached it, was rather surprised to see the terrier coming to welcome me. I was more surprised still when I pushed open the door of the larder and found the lost stag lying inside. The stag must have been brought to bay near the lodge, and some of its occupants finished it—perhaps with a shot-gun—I concluded. In this I was entirely wrong,

and it was several days later before I ascertained what had actually occurred.

On a small farm near the lodge was a ploughman who was continually running us down for cowardice. Why did we always shoot a wounded stag ? Why did we not walk up to and bleed him at once ? The animal was disabled and incapable of hurting us. We had far too much respect for our skin, and so on. At first I put this down as mere bluff, but subsequent events convinced me that the man believed what he said. The course the stag took was to the right, not to the left as I had expected, and, crossing a low spur not far from the lodge, turned to bay in a "Moss" from which the farm already mentioned obtained its supply of peat. The ploughman had either seen the stag approach or heard the terrier barking, and immediately hurried off to them. What took place was told me by another man on the farm who witnessed the whole incident. The stag had his haunches against the high peat-bank, and with his head warded off the attack of the terrier. When the ploughman came up, without a moment's hesitation he rushed in on the stag. Exactly what happened the spectator could not say, but he saw the man pitched on his back at the bottom of the "Moss." This experience evidently cooled his ardour and taught caution. On getting up he stood presumably deliberating, for he soon adopted a change of tactics. Collecting a supply of

stones, he began battering the animal, and ultimately one well-directed missile fractured the animal's skull, after which matters were easy. The beast was bled, "gralloched," and dragged to the larder. It certainly was fortunate this beast was young. Had he been an old stag the ploughman would probably have paid for his temerity with his life. About this incident he maintained a discreet silence, and never after did he denounce us for reluctance in going up to a wounded animal.

Another occasion on which I lost trace of the terrier caused me more trouble. It was during the hind-shooting season, and we had wounded a hind some time after lunch, at which I slipped a terrier of stark, wiry-haired Scotch breed. Soon both were lost to view, and, owing to the configuration of the ground, I could do nothing more than guess the direction they had taken. Had I even been tolerably sure of this, I would have sent a man after them, but it was fortunate I did not do so, as I subsequently found they had taken a course I had never dreamt of. I resolved not to waste the day, but go in after deer, watching and listening for the lost animals. I could find no trace of them, and my hope that the dog would be at the lodge was dashed when, some time after darkness had fallen, I arrived home and found it was not there. Two other parties were out, and when they returned, we found our total bag amounted to eight hinds.

Before proceeding to do the necessary work in the larder we partook of some food. During the meal the events of the day were discussed, and, among other matters, had any one seen the missing terrier? None had done so, but a pony-man averred he had heard a terrier barking during the afternoon. Close questioning convinced me that the barking could only have emanated from my lost terrier. The man was positive as to the exact spot the sounds came from, which was about two and a half miles from the lodge. I considered it desirable that the tenacious dog should be relieved, and asked who would go. None volunteered, so I took a rifle from the rack, and leaving the others to dress the hinds, hurried off in the indicated direction.

It was November, and a good moon shone from a cloudless sky. As I approached the spot I heard the terrier, and took every precaution to get as close as possible without being seen, being afraid that the terrier would come to meet me, or that the hind would break away. The latter stood in a stream, partly obscured by a high bank on the side on which I was, the farther side being low and shingly. The dog kept constantly shifting its position, and, as shooting in the moonlight requires time and care, I was afraid of hitting him. I therefore waited for as good a chance as I could get, and risked it. The hind fell, and subsequent examination showed that I had hit her in the

haunch. Quite satisfied with having succeeded in hitting her anywhere I returned to the lodge.

The shooting party there were all bachelors, and a very sporting lot, while the majority of the staff could, by no possible stretch of imagination, be regarded as templars. Among the regulations imposed and mercilessly enforced, was one that imposed upon any one that shot a deer in the haunch, the payment of a bottle of whisky for the good (?) of all whom it might concern. When I told them I had hit the hind in the haunch, the payment of this penalty was at once demanded. I thought this just a little too much. I considered that if I walked five miles after my day's work, a journey which none of the others cared to undertake, and succeeded in gaining my object, I was more worthy of a bonus than a penalty. While admitting I would willingly pay under normal circumstances, I absolutely refused to have any penalty imposed on me in the exceptional circumstances in which I acted, and stuck firmly to my resolution.

It must not, however, be supposed that all terriers were equally useful. As a matter of fact, some were absolute failures, and well do I remember my worst experience with one of them. The forest I was then on stalked with two rifles, but on the day in question only one was out, and I accompanied the head-stalker, having with me a terrier on leash. In the afternoon we got a shot, but the aim was faulty, the bullet

hitting the stag in the stomach. Now, if not otherwise alarmed, a stag hit in the stomach generally stands for some little time, apparently stupefied, before moving off, but once he does so, he is capable of covering a very considerable distance. This stag stood still, as he did not know from which direction the shot came, and saw nothing to alarm him. To save trouble I urged another shot, but the head-stalker, either mistaken as to the animal's condition or for some other reason, did not follow my suggestion. By and by the stag began to move off, and ultimately got out of range. My companion, now seeing that there was a danger of losing the beast, told me to take the rifle and dog and go after him.

The abilities of the terrier were practically unknown to me, but I had formed the opinion that he was not to be depended on, so I resolved to attempt getting within range, and only slip the dog as a last resort. The stag evidently meant to surmount the ridge on the farther side of the corrie in which he was, and I had hopes of being able to meet him at the top, all the more so as I had cover to hide me, and would thus avoid causing him to accelerate his pace. I had, however, a detour to make, and before I could get sufficiently far forward I saw him cross the top, well out of range. I noticed he was heading for a burn with very steep banks some distance ahead, and judging that crossing this would cost him some little time, I hurried on, expecting

to be able to get within range before he surmounted the opposite bank. Again I was disappointed, and as he now saw me he headed straight for the top of the hill in front. To let him get over this was the last thing I wanted, so as a final resort I slipped the terrier. The dog set off in fine style and was not long in turning him downhill and under a long edge of rock which would effectually prevent his climbing again.

Hurrying forward, I was thinking how much I had been mistaken with the terrier, when I saw him coming back to meet me. At the same time I could see the stag still speeding on farther ahead than ever. I tried to get the dog to resume pursuit, but he would not do so. I therefore ran on as fast as I could, and as the stag was now getting hard up, began to reduce the distance between us. When I got within about 400 yards of the stag, the terrier set off again, and after pursuing him for a bit again returned to me. A third time the same thing occurred. Naturally I was angry when I found that the wretch, instead of being any assistance, was actually hunting the stag away from me. No sooner had I expectations of getting a shot than the terrier set out, and at once removed the wounded beast to a safe distance. I tried to get him on the leash, but he was too wide-awake, and always kept out of arm's length. With the stag in front, I had, of course, little time to indulge in blandishments.

Eventually the stag reached a long sort of

mound with a dip and a rise at the farther end. I had again gained considerably, and as the near end of this mound took him out of view, the terrier remained pretty close to me. Just as I surmounted this mound, the top of which was perfectly flat, the stag emerged from the dip beyond. He was a long way out, and I resolved to shoot. I raised the rifle and was trying to take as steady an aim as my breathless condition would allow, when suddenly stag and sights became obscured. In order to ascertain what had caused this unusual occurrence I took down the rifle, and saw the terrier speeding along the ridge in direct line between me and the stag. As soon as he had caught sight of the animal at close distance he had adopted his usual tactics. When the beast showed clear I raised the rifle again and fired. I was lucky enough to get him rather low on a hind leg. He immediately turned downhill and stopped by the side of a stream, where I eventually finished him. I lay down to recover my breath, and while doing so noticed that the dog was not following up the stag. Nor could I see him anywhere. After a time he appeared in hot pursuit of a little knobber. Where he found it I have no idea. Both headed straight for the base of the ridge on which I lay, and, when passing below me, I shot the deer, and as the terrier stopped I managed to gain hold of it.

Besides deerhounds and terriers, other breeds of dogs have been used to track down wounded

deer, among them collies. I doubt if any of these proved much of a success. I never had any practical experience of collies, but one was used on an adjoining forest. I have watched this dog at work, and I cannot say he impressed me favourably. He belonged to one of the gentlemen at the lodge, and was probably rather spoilt for the use to which he was put, as he had been taught to jump through hoops and similar things. It is my opinion that to obtain the best results a dog should be trained for one purpose alone. When an endeavour is made to train him for several widely different purposes, it is seldom that more than mediocrity is attained in any of them—often not even that.

CHAPTER XXI

MIST

MIST has been termed "the stalker's worst enemy," and the description is not far from correct. It is heartless, and almost hopeless, wandering through a forest almost in mist while all is quiet. The stalker who sees deer before they see him may consider himself lucky. Almost inevitably he will disturb herds, as likely as not without knowing it, and one startled herd may alarm several more, the stalker remaining in blissful ignorance of what he has done. It is a far better course to give up all idea of stalking during mist. That does not, however, necessarily mean that one should not go into the forest. Mists—even dense mists—are sometimes only temporary, and clear off in the afternoon. If the stalker can get to a strategic point, and there wait until the atmosphere clears, he may have time to get a stag before darkness falls, an eventuality which a start from the lodge would preclude. On the other hand, there are times when the mist hangs low for days—even weeks—when it is much better to remain at home. Some idea of these

lengthened spells of mist can often be formed from the direction of the wind and general appearances. Mist often rises after heavy rainfall.

At the end of the season, matters are not quite so bad, for stalking "on the roar" offers some hope of success. Care and experience are necessary to have a chance of obtaining this. Once a stag is located, approach should always be made from underneath. The stalker who tries to reach his quarry from above is doomed to certain failure. The background looking uphill is always lighter than the background looking downhill. Thus the higher object can be seen by the lower, while the lower remains invisible to the higher. Even from below, approach is beset with difficulties and dangers. Progress should be slow, and advantage taken of every bit of cover. The keenest scrutiny should be exercised all round. Beat-out knobbers always have to be reckoned with. One may be lying down, and consequently invisible, until he springs to his feet and dashes off. But even then he may do no mischief, for I have several times seen a knobber, so alarmed, being met and driven off by the master stag, who evidently attributed his return to other feelings than those of danger.

If the stalker keeps a sharp look out, and knows what he is about, the form of a deer will at first appear as an indefinite blotch darker than the surrounding mist. Large stones and

other prominent objects will appear the same, but the only safe procedure is to drop at once and advance carefully until the object takes shape. If a deer, it should be approached as nearly as is consistent with safety. When this point has been reached, a halt should be called, even though the animal in view is a hind or a knobber. If patience is exercised, the master stag is almost certain to come around sooner or later, rounding up his harem or driving off unwanted rivals. Mist frequently varies in intensity, and sometimes a decrease in its density gives a really good chance. On the other hand, the thickness of the mist may remain the same, the stag may not come round, or, if he does, may rush past, his form showing like a mere phantom. It is all a matter of chance. Nevertheless, I have obtained several good stags by adopting these tactics under such unfavourable conditions. They, however, require the exercise of patience and the endurance of discomfort.

The magnifying effects of mist are very remarkable. In its murky pall a stag appears to offer a very long shot, while in reality he is not more than 30 or 40 yards distant. Deceived by the apparent distance, the beginner aims right up on to the body, and the bullet passes harmlessly over the animal's back. Under such circumstances I have always advised aiming right under the stag's body, though there have been occasions on which I have seen that my advice was not taken. I do not much wonder,

for to the uninitiated aiming clear of the beast's body seems like ensuring the certainty of a miss. A hit with a low aim is generally fatal, and this is most desirable. Even when severely wounded a stag has only to turn a short distance to one side or another, when the chances of his being seen are small indeed. Bodies of stags thus wounded are sometimes afterwards found in situations which cause wonder why they were not previously detected.

In mist, too, a very small stag appears of gigantic proportions. I am certain that not a few young stalkers I have accompanied felt rather sore when I refused to shoot at these small deer. The only way to convince the most doubting of these is to allow them to follow their own inclinations, and if they succeed in killing, their disillusionment is very apparent indeed. It is my opinion that there are some who can only be convinced of actual size and distance by practical personal experience.

To get lost in a fog in a deer forest is no pleasant experience, as there are occasions on which life itself may be endangered. "When lost, follow a stream, and it will eventually take you to a human habitation," is advice gratuitously given. Such counsel requires qualification. If you lose your bearings on the watershed between two rivers running in opposite directions, and get into the wrong basin, you may eventually find yourself a very long way indeed from home by adopting this advice. And what of burns

that tumble headlong over precipices down which no man can go and live ?

Well do I remember the first time I got lost in a mist in the forest. It was my first season on the hill as a gillie, and I was a mere boy at the time. The party I was with reached the top of a big corrie, and there waited for a time. The mist hung half-way down the hillsides, and as it showed no sign of rising, I and another man were ordered to make a detour and come down a tributary corrie in hopes that we might move deer below the mist line. Our route lay for nearly a mile along our boundary with another forest, which said boundary was here the watershed. To this the ground rose in gentle undulations off both sides—a dead monotony—absolutely destitute of any outstanding landmark. I had little experience, but had previously been taking mental notes of the lie of the land. My companion was elderly, but new to the work, and being rather dull-witted, was not better qualified to deal with adverse conditions than I was. As we ascended towards the boundary, some difference of opinion arose which culminated in a spirited argument. At last I noticed we were near the watershed. “Let us keep downhill a bit,” I said, “for if we get right on to the top we may get into another forest and lose our way.” So we held downhill. Alas ! the watershed had already been crossed, and we were doing exactly what I thought I had taken precautions to prevent.

Never suspecting anything wrong we held our way. "We should be near such-and-such a burn now," I remarked. "Here it is," rejoined my companion, before we had gone another ten yards. In crossing the little rill something aroused my suspicions, and I followed its course for a few yards. Some of the small pools among the black rocks seemed strangely unfamiliar. "I am not sure we are on the right course," I said. "Let us go down the burn a bit and we will easily be able to tell if this is the stream it ought to be." If we were right this burn should soon pursue its course between high and rocky banks, but no sign of banks appeared. At last I noticed the marks of a pony's feet coming up the stream. No pony could ever come up the stream I was looking for. We were hopelessly lost. We had no idea where we were, nor to this day do I know.

However, it behoved us to get our bearings again, so we at once started to retrace our steps in hopes of reaching some place we could recognise. After walking some time we again came on a small stream. Its appearance seemed rather familiar, and we proceeded downwards along its side. Soon we discovered it was the very stream we had just left. There could be no doubt about it for our footprints were easily distinguishable in the soft peat. Starting again, we covered about the same distance, and again reached a stream. It was the same burn we had already twice visited. Were we never to get away from this accursed water? What was the

attraction that, magnet-like, always brought us back to it ? We held a consultation, but could think of no other course than to resume the attempt in which we had already twice failed. This time we walked farther without encountering water. Suddenly my companion exclaimed, "We are back to where we started from." I refused to believe him. "Come this way," he said, "and I will convince you." I followed him a few yards when he pointed to a place where the grass was all trampled flat. In the wait before we started our feet had got cold, and we had been beating them on the ground for warmth. That this was the place where that had been done could not be disputed.

Again we started, and this time took very good care not to surmount the ridge. Reaching the head of the corrie, we proceeded downwards, and when clear of the mist discovered the stalking party standing over a dead stag. On joining them neither of us ever referred to our experience. Of course we were credited with having moved the herd out of which the stag was got, but I am certain any such credit was entirely undeserved. We were much longer in appearing than we should have been, but for this we got praise instead of censure, as it was taken for granted that we had seen the deer and stopped in order to allow them time to settle, and thus afford a better chance at a shot. It is wonderful how one sometimes gets undeserved credit. The stalkers had no suspicion of the

[H. T. Ianb Wallace

GIOVACHI, LOOKING TOWARDS BEN AFFROW



real state of affairs, and we did not seek to enlighten them.

Elated with success, we now decided to play the same game over again. There were two parallel corries at the lower extremity of the forest, and an attempt was to be made under the mist to move any deer the farther one might contain. The man who had accompanied me was required for something else, and this task was deputed to me alone. As my confidence was already shaken, this proposal was far from meeting with my approval. There was no help for it, however, away I had to go. Exercising every precaution, I reached the head of the corrie all right. These two lower corries ran exactly parallel to each other, being separated by a long, level, flat-topped ridge. Where the upper end of this ridge terminated, a large circular hill shot up high and steep. It was at the farther side of this hill I now stood.

Before proceeding down the corrie I paused to consider means whereby I might accurately keep my bearings. The corrie ran westward, and it was down its northern side that I intended to go, consequently, by keeping my right to the steep side of the slope, it would be impossible to go wrong. So at least I thought. But I overlooked one very important consideration. I stood high upon the circular hill already mentioned, and, unless I descended very rapidly, I would pass above the low, abutting ridge and circle round the hill I was on to the next corrie,

with the steep hill on my right. And this was just exactly what happened. I passed above the low ridge into the next corrie, where all unconsciously I pursued my way in quite the opposite direction.

As the burn in the bottom, of course, rose, and I descended, I soon reached the stream. My consternation may be imagined when I found the water flowing in an opposite direction to what I expected. I could scarcely believe my own eyes. It seemed impossible that I could have gone wrong. What had really happened never occurred to me. After a little reflection, I decided to go downstream until clear of the mist, in hopes that I might then ascertain where I was. This I accordingly did, and, when under the mist, at once recognised my surroundings. I was in the wrong corrie, so, regaining the cover of the mist, I hurried down the end of the hill and emerged into view from the corrie down which I ought to have come. No questions were asked, and I deemed it better to maintain a discreet silence.

If it is bad to get lost in a forest when one is by himself, it is infinitely worse to do so with a pony. In the latter case it is easy to get into places where there is both difficulty and danger in getting the pony out again. I have oftener than once gone off the proper route with a pony, but was always lucky enough to find out before I had gone far astray, and was always able to regain my bearings with little

trouble. It is when a person is careless, and especially if he is nervous, that the greatest danger ensues. I remember a rather excitable gentleman who, despite all that could be said, resolved to go home by himself from the far end of the forest. Evening was approaching, and though there was no mist, by some means or other he lost his way. Darkness closed in, and as he came not, search-parties were sent out with lanterns. Fortunately he saw one of them, and made for it. He was brought home in a very agitated state, and had to remain in bed for a day or two before he completely recovered.

My last experience of getting lost occurred during the war years. The season was drawing to a close, stags were roaring, and though the mist hung low we decided to start, hoping that it might clear—otherwise to try our luck. I made my way to a favourable and sheltered place, and there waited. All was still : evidently no big stags were near. The mist grew denser and denser until, I think, I was never out in a thicker fog. Convinced that it was useless to wait longer, I resolved to move to the top of a high hill at the head of a big corrie. I had to take the pony along with me, for to leave it behind meant that I should not see it again.

We had a good distance to go over the ground of a treacherously monotonous description. The forest we were on had once been a sheep-run, and between it and an older forest

a fence had been erected. This fence swept over the top of the hill I meant to reach, down into a hollow and about half-way up the slope I was to traverse. Here it abruptly terminated, probably because material had become exhausted. I meant to catch the end of the fence and then follow it to the top. Difficult though it was to keep the proper route when vision was limited to a circle of a few yards in diameter, I always knew to a few yards where I was until in the proximity of this old fence. Before reaching it I began to descend, and feeling, I suppose, that the worst part was over, probably got less attentive.

By and by I began to notice prominences in the peaty ground that seemed unfamiliar. I began to doubt if I was where I should be, but thought the unfamiliar aspect might be due to mist effects. In a little I came upon a well-trodden deer path. This removed all doubt; no such path was on our ground.

The gentleman and the pony-man had no idea where they were, and if it had been possible I would have circled round and tried to regain our own ground without ever informing them that I had gone astray. This was, however, impossible, for I was right in the centre of the soft, peaty ground, and dreaded to take the pony out by any other way than the way we had come. A stag now began roaring no distance from us, and the gentleman wished me to go after him. This I refused to do. I may

here remark that one of the easiest ways to get lost is to follow a roaring stag on the move over difficult ground. Your attention gets so centred on the deer that you take no thought where you are going, and when the pursuit terminates, often as otherwise you are quite at a loss to know exactly where you are.

There was no help for it. I had to confess that I had lost my bearings, and must be some distance into the adjoining forest. I knew the ground was too soft to allow of a pony being taken straight back in the direction of the fence, so I decided to make for the top of the height above where it ended. I could get the pony's tracks to the edge of the peat, and after that I had only got to ascend to the highest point I could reach. Whether I went straight or not did not matter, as long as I kept ascending, and on the very summit was a cairn. Once there I had no further difficulty. I afterwards found I had only missed the end of the fence by a few yards. Towards evening the mist cleared away, and we had the satisfaction of getting a good stag on our homeward journey.

CHAPTER XXII

WIND AND LIGHT

AFTER more than forty years spent on the Highlands "a-chasing the deer," I am now no longer fit for the somewhat arduous work of the professional deer-stalker. I may with justice claim a fairly observant disposition—a desire to get to the bottom of things—and not only have I built up theories, but have never missed an opportunity of putting them to a practical test. During these years I have therefore amassed a good deal of knowledge on the habits of deer, the wild life of the forests, and the variations of natural phenomena. The following, I hope, may be found of some practical use to present-day stalkers, for though nothing can supersede personal experience, still there is something to be learned from the experience of others.

Two of the most important factors in deer-stalking are, undoubtedly, wind and light. Where the formation of the ground is practically uniform, wind generally causes little trouble, as it blows fairly steadily from one point. There are, however, many deep, narrow, tortuous, and

branching corries in which the wind is so much deflected that it will be found to blow from quite unexpected directions. Actual experience can only demonstrate these, but, as a general rule, the same formation of ground produces the same currents of air when the wind blows from the same point. One example should therefore hold good for all, and the observant stalker should have a tolerably accurate idea of how the wind blows in corries which he has never seen before if he has had experience of one of similar formation.

On the other hand, there are places where it is almost impossible to determine the point from which the wind will blow. Well do I remember one little corrie that baffled me for longer than I care to admit. This corrie branched off at less than right angles to a long, broad valley that ran approximately north and south. It was deep and narrow. On its southerly side was a very high and very steep hill; on its northern, a long, sloping ridge of about one-third of the height of the hill on the opposite side. With a northerly wind, the side of this ridge was a favourite resort of deer, as it afforded excellent shelter. Owing to the formation of the ground, they could only be approached from the northwards, and here it was the trouble began. I invariably tried to approach on a side wind, sometimes from the higher side, sometimes from the lower, as conditions seemed to offer the best chances of

success. Sometimes the stalk would come off all right, at other times it proved an abject failure, and, as far as I could see, conditions in both cases were exactly similar.

Still I felt there must be some reason for the different results. After much thought I hit upon what I thought must be the solution. Of course I took the first opportunity of testing my theory, and had the gratification of finding it correct. With a gentle breeze, I could reckon on success; with a gale, failure was certain. Of the result, I was no longer in doubt; but how to account for it was the question. Why should a simple variation in the strength of the wind cause a variation in the air currents of the corrie? Ultimately it occurred to me that a strong wind might hit the steep hill on the opposite side and recoil across the corrie, while a gentle breeze would not have sufficient strength to do so. If that were so, it was evident that the wind did not recoil straight back, as my approach was always well to one side or the other of the deer. From that I deduced that any hope of a successful stalk in a northerly gale was to get the wind in my back, and go straight at the deer. This I subsequently found to be the most successful manner of approach, although it was not entirely satisfactory. The deer generally got our wind just as we got within range, but all the same we got many a good stag by a down-wind approach which we could not have got by any other method. Such

was my greatest wind problem. I never came across another such place, though, doubtless, there are others to be found in Highland deer forests.

On one occasion I came upon deer in a corrie I had never before stalked. I was on its eastern brow, for the corrie ran approximately north and south. A deep burn flowed from the side I was on right down into the bottom of the corrie, affording an excellent means of advance. The deer were in the upper part of the corrie, but feeding peacefully downwards, and it was from this burn that I expected to get a shot. I had stalked similar ground with a similar wind before, and had found that in such places the wind would blow true often for a considerable length of time, when, without the slightest warning, a puff would come from exactly the opposite direction. Then, the mischief done, the wind would again resume its course. Such, I feared, would be the case here.

"Let us get down that burn and wait their approach," said the gentleman who was with me. "I am afraid of the wind down there," I replied. "I think we should time ourselves so as to reach the bottom just as the deer come within shot. I am convinced that the shorter the time we are in the corrie the better our chance of success." To this he agreed, and we reached the bottom just as the deer came within range. I picked out the best stag, and the

gentleman was raising the rifle to his shoulder when I noticed the gentle breeze fall off to a dead calm, and next moment felt the wind hit the back of my head. In an instant the deer were off, but not before a well-placed bullet dropped the best stag just as he was in the act of turning. I may here remark that every change of wind is preceded by a calm. It may only be momentary, but still it is a calm.

On another occasion, I was out stalking on strange ground. Deer were scarce, and two rifles went out together to act subsequently as circumstances seemed to dictate. Ultimately we saw two lots of deer a very considerable distance apart. One lot was high up on the shoulder of a hill so bare that near approach seemed impossible. The other lot lay low down near the bottom of a corrie, from which branched another at an acute angle, the two corries together somewhat resembling the form of a V, and separated at their lower extremities by a sloping ridge, on one side of which the deer lay. I could see the deer could be got at as far as cover was concerned, but I feared the wind would blow down both corries, thus making approach extremely hazardous.

Turning to the other stalker, who had been on the ground for some time, I said, "We will now separate, and go after a lot each. Take your choice, and say which lot you prefer to stalk." To my secret satisfaction he took the lot lying in the corrie, leaving me to deal with

the exposed deer. With care I managed to pull off a success. I did not see my companion until he came into the larder at night. "Well, how did you get on ?" I asked. "Oh, I never saw them again!" was his reply. He had made up his mind that the wind would be blowing only down the other corrie, and stalked down the corrie the deer lay in, finding out when too late that the wind blew down both corries, as I had suspected.

The variations of light and shade do not, I fear, receive from stalkers the attention they deserve, nor are the opportunities they offer anything like taken full advantage of. Many stalkers seem to think that it is impossible to pass, or approach, in full view of deer, unless a long way off, and do not try. Now, in many instances, this can be done successfully, if due regard is paid to the variations of light or colour. In most forests you will find green expanses sharply terminated by beds of heather, or stretches of peat, bounded by growths of moss, heather, or grass. It must be obvious that an object is much less easily discerned exactly where these variations of colour meet than on an unbroken expanse of either. It is along this colour-line that the stalker must proceed—slowly, and on all fours: slowly because a slowly moving object is less easily noticed: and on all fours because, if upright, most of the human form would be projected beyond the colour-line, and the end aimed at lost.

As an illustration of the above, I may briefly describe a stalk which I could not possibly have carried out, had I not taken full advantage of colour variation. It was an extremely hot day, and the deer I wanted to get to lay well down the top of a long ridge, where the gentle breeze did something to alleviate the heat of the sun. To get within range, I had to cross the ridge higher up than they were, but from where they lay they commanded a full view of the ridge right up to the very top. Well up was an expanse of peat, bounded on its high side by an unbroken stretch of mosses and grass. I concluded that my only chance of crossing unnoticed was by adhering closely to where the peat and mosses joined. The light was good, but by sticking to the colour-line, and moving slowly and steadily forward on hands and knees, I crossed the ridge without being detected.

I then got into a small burn with steep banks, and here progress was easy. Ultimately I reached a place where the burn took a sharp turn, which brought us in full view of part at least of the herd. The high banks still continued, but here they curved back from the burn until they were about 40 yards apart. Between was alluvial matter, flat as a table, and covered with grass of the darkest green hue. Through the middle of this ran the burn, the surface of its water not 6 inches below the level of the grass. About 30 yards ahead the burn turned again, affording excellent cover. I knew

if I could cross the flat in front of me I would have no further difficulty, but how was that to be done ? To venture on the grass was a certain failure, for I was close to the deer now, and in that glorious sunshine they could not fail to see me against such deep and unbroken verdure.

I pondered over every likely and even unlikely means of advance, and finally decided that the only method which offered any chance of success was to get into and go down the burn. Here its bottom was peaty, and it showed almost black when compared with the dark green on either side. We therefore got into the water, and, keeping close to the bank on the side on which the deer lay, we slowly proceeded downstream. Where the water was not too deep we went on hands and knees, I, of course, keeping the rifle on the grass. In pools, we otherwise kept as low as we could. During all the time I kept my eyes fixed on the deer, anxiously watching to see if any of them had "spotted" us. But no ; and it was with a sigh of relief that I again got under cover, knowing that a mere walk to the next bank would bring my duty to a successful close. I must confess I would not have been surprised had the deer bounded away while we were in the burn. Had it not been for the difference in colour between the burn and the grass we could never have done what we did. As it was, such a fine light, and so near the deer, the risk was

great. Attention to minor details, however, sometimes counts for much.

The light of the sun is also worthy of consideration. I well remember a wide, deep corrie running north and south, into which the declining afternoon sun cast such a deep gloom that it was impossible for any one on its eastern verge to see even the surface of the ground on the opposite side. One day I glassed this corrie from the south, and could see several good stags on its western side, and, opposite them, on the eastern side, a considerable number of hinds. Owing to the direction of the wind, I could only approach these stags from the northwards, which meant that I had to skirt the eastern side of the corrie, and so round its top.

On my way round, I halted to reconnoitre. Look as I might, I could not see a single deer on the opposite side, so dense was the haze cast by the declining sun. Yet, as I could only see the hinds under me, I felt convinced the stags were still there. I also found out that these hinds commanded a view of the other side, and at first thought they would effectually bar all approach to the stags, for to alarm one lot meant to alarm both. At last the idea occurred to me, if I cannot see objects on the other side it is not likely that the hinds can do so, even though possessed of keener eyesight. I therefore went round, and got into the shadow near the top end of the corrie. From here there was no gloom visible, every object being quite apparent, and it seemed

impossible to escape the notice of the hinds. I knew, however, that from the opposite side the effect was quite different.

To get all the advantage possible, I kept immediately in and under the top verge of the shadow cast by the sun. I was not without misgivings, for the light from where I was was really good, and I could scarcely realise that the hinds would have more difficulty in seeing me than I had in seeing them. Yet I pushed steadily forward, and managed to pull off a successful stalk, which I certainly could not have done had it not been for the variation of light and shade. I may here remark that the haze of gloom above described only occurs during certain atmospheric conditions, generally in September, and is only noticeable when looking against the sun.

CHAPTER XXIII

A MEMORABLE DAY

THE season was well advanced ; it was either the last week in September or the beginning of October, and the more forward of the stags had only just begun to pay attention to the hinds. Though two rifles were usually out, for some reason which I forget, only one was available on the day in question. I was deputed to accompany the sportsman while the other stalker went to the vacant beat to see what was on it, and to be of any assistance to us that he could be. Little did I suspect the nature of the assistance he was destined to render before night. I had with me a pony-man and a youngish gillie, who led a little white terrier, used for tracking down wounded deer. The gentleman was elderly and stout, and could not walk far uphill without getting pumped. He kept a riding pony, on the back of which he sat until he reached the high tops in the mornings when circumstances allowed. To make it easier for the old man, I used this pony throughout the day whenever I could. I found that even though we had a detour to make this often saved time.

I was now soon to find out that my consideration in this respect received but scant appreciation, if, indeed, it was realised at all.

We had not been long out before I saw a small lot of hinds with one good stag amongst them. They lay rather more than half-way up the hill-side right in front of us, but a considerable distance off. They offered an easy approach, and I resolved to try for that stag. Between us and them lay a corrie round the top of which I intended proceeding, as the pony could be used to carry the gentleman all the way round. “How do you propose going?” he asked, after I had shown him the deer, and I told him. “Why don’t you go straight at them? I always think you fellows take too long in getting up to deer,” he rejoined. “Do you see that little peat-bank all by itself straight above the deer?” I asked. “Yes.” “Well, that is where we must shoot from. To reach there the difference in time will be little, if any, more by going round the corrie than in crossing it, but since you prefer the latter we can go that way.”

When we reached the edge of the corrie, I stopped. “We will have to leave the ponies now, sir; it’s impossible to take them across here,” I remarked. “Don’t allow anything I said make you alter your original intentions,” he rejoined. “It’s a matter of little consequence,” I replied. “We can go this way for a change.” Telling the pony-man where to stop, to keep a good look-out, and to act as he thought

best, I proceeded down the corrie. Both its sides were high and steep, the whole of that on which we were and half of the lower side being rough, broken ground. I think before we reached the opposite side the gentleman must have regretted his choice of route. Even then we had a considerable distance to walk, much more in fact than if he had ridden the pony round as I suggested.

Eventually we reached the peat-bank I had previously indicated. The deer were about 100 yards distant, but by this time they had all lain down, the stag—a good ten-pointer—on the farther side. Though the sky bore a somewhat threatening appearance, and the day was rather cold, there was no breeze, and, thinking that the stag would not lie long, I decided to wait for him to rise. This he was longer in doing than I expected. Something having attracted my attention, I took my eyes off the deer for a minute or two. When I next looked, I found the stag had risen, walked right through the hinds, and now stood a perfect broadside, and actually the nearest deer to us. I gave the gentleman the rifle, and he apparently took careful aim and fired. A broken foreleg was the result. The second barrel followed, but the bullet was wide of the mark. Alarmed by the sound of the shots, but unable to determine from whence they came, the deer rushed straight towards us. This was exactly the direction in which I did not want them to move. The top of the hill was no

distance behind us, and beyond was a considerable flat at the far side of which was our boundary with another forest. If we could not stop the stag, it was certain he would pass off our ground.

I tried to reload as quickly as possible. The first empty case came out freely, but the discharge had caused the second one to jam in the chambers. Before I got it out, I lost a little valuable time. Between the delay and the advancing deer the gentleman completely lost his head. Picking up the case I had first extracted, he pushed it into one chamber at the same time as I shoved a bullet into the other. By this time the deer were close beside us, the stag running clear. Raising the rifle, he held at the stag. The first attempt proved to be the empty case which, of course, produced no result, nor did the live cartridge prove any more effective. "You stop him," he said, handing me the rifle. Alas! the chance was past. Immediately in our rear was a swell in the ground which would take them out of our sight. Already they had passed us, the foremost topping this swell. Thrusting a cartridge into one of the chambers, I sprang to my feet to get a better view. I could just see the stag's head and part of his neck over the swell. I fired right from the shoulder, but missed clean. Naturally, I was not a little chagrined. That the wounded stag should have been allowed to pass so close to us could be due to nothing else but incom-

petence. Regrets were, however, useless ; any remedy was only to be found in immediate action.

"Slip the terrier," I said to the man who accompanied me, and, seizing the rifle, rushed off after the deer. I could spare no time for instructions, neither had I much inclination to impart them, nor should any have been necessary. Both of those I left behind had at least some experience, and that they would watch me from the hilltop, and act as they thought circumstances dictated, was only a reasonable expectation. I hoped to get the stag before he had gone far over our boundary. After reaching the top, the ground he had to traverse was a wide expanse of soft peat into which he would sink deeply. The terrier had but little leeway to make up, would skim lightly over the peat, and thus gain rapidly on the wounded animal.

In this instance my calculations proved correct. I was not half-way across the flat on the top when the yapping of the terrier broke on my ears. Proceeding carefully, I found the dog had brought the stag to a stop in a small burn not more than 400 or 500 yards over our boundary. Now, though a terrier can stop a wounded stag, he is quite unable to hold him if he becomes apprehensive of any greater danger. It was, therefore, necessary for me to approach them unseen. Fortunately this could be easily effected. A large, round mound rose close to the burnside no distance from them, and by

deviating a short distance, I brought this between. Under cover of this hillock, I pushed forward as fast as possible expecting to get a shot from the top.

I continued to hear the barking of the terrier as I advanced, but the sounds ceased while I was still some distance short of my objective. This I regarded as ominous ; something had happened. Reaching the top of the mound, I carefully and anxiously looked over. Nothing was to be seen. Terrier and stag had disappeared, and nowhere could I see or hear any trace of them. A little consideration convinced me that they could only have gone down the burn. The hillock would hide them to start with, and after that the windings of the burn. Had they left the stream on either side, I could not have failed to have seen them. But what had alarmed the stag and caused him to break away from the terrier ?

I looked round to see if I could find a cause. A mere glance was enough to show me the reason of the stag's alarm, and I must admit it was as surprising as it was unexpected. Coming full cry towards me across the peat, scorning all ideas of cover, was the man who led the terrier. Rather more than 100 yards behind him was the gentleman at a less rapid rate, but no doubt doing his best, and equally regardless of cover. What good purpose they thought they were thus to serve I do not know, but as to what they had achieved I had no doubt. I

am afraid that, though alone, I indulged in some remarks that were not congratulatory.

I, however, meant to get that wounded stag, and the sooner the better, so I set off down the burn as fast as I could go. The burn continued its course through flattish, peaty ground for almost a mile, then dashed headlong over high precipices into the deep corrie below. Though I listened for the barking of the terrier, everything was quiet until I reached the top of the rocks when its yapping reached me. Evidently the dog had brought the stag to a standstill at the top of the rocks and a little to the left of where the burn took the leap. Near the verge a long rock or boulder projected above the ground, and for this I now made. Carefully I now raised my head until I saw the tips of the stag's horns. I sought to see no more, for I knew he would at once catch sight of me if I came within his view, and instantly make off. I was too pumped for sure aim, so lay down behind the rock to get breath.

At last, feeling fairly steady, I drew myself up on the stone. I had expected to get a full view of the stag, and now, to my disgust, I found that a ridge intervened high enough to hide all but his head and neck. He saw me the instant I showed, and made off. A few yards ahead a rock would cover him. I had to shoot, but had the broadside of his neck, so fired at once. He disappeared in an instant. Rushing forward, I saw the terrier, but there were no signs of the

stag. When I reached where the dog was, the reason at once became apparent. The animal had been on the very verge of the rocks, and, on getting the bullet, toppled over. He now lay well down on the grass-covered ledge into which his horns were evidently deeply embedded. I saw that by going down the burn until level with him I could reach the ledge without difficulty.

Previous to this, I had noticed what I took to be a light-coloured mist descending on some of the higher hills. Before descending to the stag, I looked back. The obscurity had come down rapidly, and was already at the place where the terrier had first stopped the stag. Now I could see it was not a mist, but a thickly falling snow, and that it was spreading all round. "We're in for a bad night," I mentally concluded. When I reached the stag, a fresh problem presented itself: How was he to be got out of here? The top and both sides of the corrie were ringed round with precipices hundreds of feet high. Therefore, to get him to the top was out of the question. To get a pony to the bottom of the rocks necessitated for us a circuit of miles and a return by the same route, and this, too, on ground that was not ours. Rather reluctantly, I came to the conclusion that the best way was to sacrifice the carcass. I cut the head off, and threw the body into a deep crevasse at the edge of the ledge.

Starting on the return journey, I had just reached the top of the rocks when I was confronted by a man. To my utter astonishment, this was the gillie who accompanied me.

"What are you doing here?" I asked.

"I followed you."

"And where is Mr.——?"

"He was near the head of the burn the last time I saw him."

"Why in the name of Heaven did you leave him?" I exclaimed. "Didn't you see what was coming? If he has not got back to his own ground he never will now in that snowstorm. My God! I believe the man will be lost."

The gillie stood pallid and speechless. So absorbed had he been in the pursuit of the stag that he had thought of nothing else. It was only now when a sense of the very real danger that existed was brought to him that he realised the blunder he had made. And now the storm broke upon us. Great snowflakes falling thick and fast filled the air. A gentle breeze carried them onwards, and so dense did the atmosphere become that vision was limited to a radius of not more than thirty yards. I was terribly alarmed. If the gentleman had got caught by this storm in that burn, his position was perilous indeed. All around, for a long distance, the ground was a broken expanse of rough, uneven peat, and in the thickly falling snow even the most experienced hill-

man might easily lose his way. That the gentleman could keep his bearings in such circumstances I never expected.

As we proceeded up the burn, I began reckoning possibilities. On the hilltop, just above where we shot from, was a large cairn which was occasionally used as a shelter. When left alone, the gentleman might have made his way to this, well knowing that I was certain to return there. On the other hand, he might have directed his course to where he knew the ponies were. If so, he was certainly caught, for the storm would have overtaken him before he could have reached them; whereas, the distance being short, he had ample time to reach the cairn. Again, he might have hung about in the vicinity of the place where the stag first came to a stand, keeping a look out for my appearance. I had an uneasy feeling that this was what he would do. I felt confident that he would take no notice of the approaching danger until it was upon him, when he would make an effort to return, and, as likely as not, go in the opposite direction. There was another possibility, but it was so unlikely that a thought of it never occurred to me.

I next considered what I was to do. It would not delay my progress much to visit the ponies, and the pony-man might be able to give me some information. If no result was thus obtained, then all of us would get to the cairn before mentioned, and if the gentle-

man was not there, tie up the ponies, and proceed to search for him. To reach the ponies, we had to cross a hollow on the side of which near to us were several high peat-banks. We had got right into the hollow when a shout sounded behind us. By this time, in addition to the snow, there was more than a suspicion of hoar, and I could not see from whence the sound proceeded. Turning back, I saw the forms of two men sheltering underneath a peat-bank. On a nearer approach, I made them out to be the gentleman and the other stalker. I don't think I ever felt so much relieved. Mutual explanations, of course, followed.

I found that the other stalker had made his way to a high eminence right at the head of the corrie in which we stalked. From here he had seen most of what took place. He could see where the stag first came to a stand, but could not further view the downward course of the burn. Eventually, he saw the gentleman seeking the top of peat-banks and scanning the surroundings through his telescope. Noting the approaching change in the weather, and realising that for some reason or other the gentleman had been left all alone, he at once hurried to join him before the descending obscurity arrived. Having formed a rough idea of where I had gone, the stalker concluded that I would return by the ponies, and took up a position on what he considered would be my line of approach. It was extremely fortunate

that the man acted as he did. Sometimes things unforeseen fit in beautifully for benefit as well as the reverse. The method I took of disposing with the stag's body met with approval, as to bring it home would have necessitated communication with the lessee of the adjoining forest, and have monopolised the attention of two men and a pony for a whole day. Thus, after much quite unnecessary trouble and anxiety, the whole of this affair ended far more satisfactorily than I had at one time expected.

We now bent our steps towards the ponies, and after the stag's head had been tied on to the deer saddle, we started for home. Instead of taking the usual route, we were glad to go down the nearest corrie for shelter. This corrie ran at almost right angles to a larger one, and, though snow continued to fall, as we got to lower levels visibility became much better. We had nearly reached the place where the burn which drained the corrie joined the larger stream when a stag appeared on the crest of the hill and, though I cannot say whether or not disturbed, came straight towards us at a good round pace. The ponies were hidden under the steep burn bank, and he was quite unconscious of our presence. On he came, straight as a line. It was evident that he was to run straight into us, so we prepared for a shot. When he reached the edge of the larger stream, he paused and looked round, offering

a three parts broadside. He was within easy range, so I advised the gentleman to shoot. Conditions were certainly far from ideal, yet the stag dropped dead to the shot. It was a wonderful piece of luck, and capable of affording a long sequence of reasoning. Had it not been for our delays over the first stag, the rough weather which caused the change in our homeward route, and our arrival at the right place at the right time, we should never have seen the second stag. Coincidence, luck, chance, call it what you will, is responsible for strange happenings in deer-stalking as in other human affairs.

